



NSO' AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

**Readings in the Social History of the
Western Grassfields of Cameroon**

Edited by B. Chem-Langhee and V.G. Fanzo

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

NSO' AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

READINGS IN THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE WESTERN GRASSFIELDS OF CAMEROON

Edited by
B. Chem-Langhee & V.G. Fanso
Assisted by M.Goheen and E.M. Chilver



Langa Research & Publishing CIG
Mankon, Bamenda

Publisher:

Langaa RPCIG

Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group

P.O. Box 902 Mankon

Bamenda

North West Region

Cameroon

Langaagrp@gmail.com

www.langaa-rpcig.net

Distributed in and outside N. America by African Books Collective

orders@africanbookscollective.com

www.africanbookcollective.com

ISBN: 9956-717-53-3

© 2011 B.Chem Langhee & V.G. Fanson

DISCLAIMER

All views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Langaa RPCIG.

Fo
Yaa woo Kov
wo wu-uu
Nangsin Dzi'im Nso'
Tar kfin sanq
Lii wong wun a Ram Nso' 0

In memory of Yaa woo Kov
who improved Nso' living standards and
preserved in writing
Nso' culture and pedigree





HIS ROYAL MAJESTY
SAM MBINGLO I
FON NSO 1995





1958

(waiting for Fon Nso' at kimbun Fon (if Yaa woo Kov) (note Fon Nso
far left)

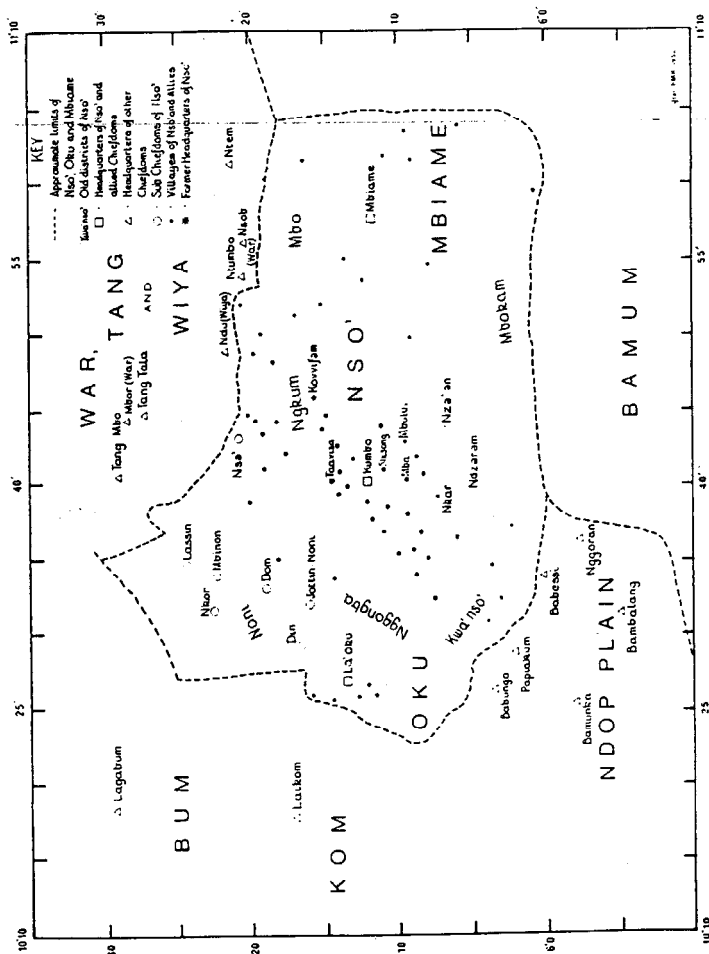


Table of Content

Preface.....	vii
Introduction.....	xiii

Section I. The Regional Background

1.The History Of The Peopling Of Western Cameroon And The Genesis Of Its Landscapes Jean-Pierre Warnier.....	3
2. Traditional Diplomacy, Trade And Warfare In The Nineteenth Century Western Grassfields Paul Nchoji Nkwi.....	23

Section II. Precolonial Studies

3.The Oku Iron Industry In Its Regional Setting: A Descriptive Account Ian Fowler.....	51
4. Traditional Modes Of Cooperation In Nso': A Brief Description Bongfen Chem-Langhee.....	89

Section III. The Colonial Impact

5. The Bafut And The Germans, 1889-1907 Matthias L. Niba.....	101
6. Nso' And The Germans: The First Encounters In Contemporary Documents And Oral Tradition V.G. Fanzo E.M. Chilver.....	119
7. Native Administration In The West Central Cameroons 1902-1954 E.M. Chilver.....	153

Section IV. Continuity and Compromise at the Grassroots

8. A Girl Growing Up In Nso': 1940-1943
Jedida Asheri.....207
9. Land And Cultivation Rights In Nso' In The Nineteen Forties
Phyllis M. Kaberry..... 221
10. Nuptiality In The Jakiri District Of Cameroon
Dan. N. Lantum.....245

Section V. Continuities at the Palace

11. The Fon's Wives In Nso'
Paul N. Mzeka..... 279
12. Nto' Nso' And Its Occupants: Privileged Access And Internal
Organization In The Old And New Palaces
B. Chem-Langhee Verkijlka G. Fanzo
E.M. Chilver..... 289
13. The Transfer Of Power And Authority In Nto' Nso'
Verkijlka G. Fanzo
B. Chem-Langhee..... 335
14. The Transfer Of Power And Authority In Nto' Ngkar
B. Chem-Langhee..... 363

Section VI. Institutional Changes

15. The Ideology And Political Economy Of Gender: Women And Land
In Nso'
Miriam Goheen.....387
16. The Nso' Area Cooperative Union
Bongfen Chem-Langhee..... 405
17. Nso' Traditional Medical And Mortuary A Concepts And Practices:

Description

B. Chem-Langhee ,V.G. Fanzo.....	427
18.Death, Afterlife And Funerary Rituals In Nso’: Practice And Belief In A Changing Society·	
Joseph Banadzem.....	443
 Section VII. Ideology and Conflict	
19.Chiefs, Sub-Chiefs And Local Control: Negotiations Over Land, Struggles Over Meaning	
Miriam Goheen.....	463

Preface

Phyllis Mary Kaberry (1910-1977): A Biographical Sketch

We have dedicated this collection of essays to the memory of Phyllis Kaberry, better known to many of us as Yaa woo Kov. This brief preface introduces her to a younger generation.

Phyllis was born in California of English parents. The surname (pronounced Kay-berry) is common in Yorkshire. Her father, an architect, took his family to Australia, where Phyllis was educated and grew up with 'her brothers. She went to the University of Sydney, where she took a first degree in history, philosophy and social anthropology and then went on to a Master's degree, awarded with a First Class in 1935, in social anthropology.

Her first fieldwork was conducted among the Aboriginal groups of north-western Australia, the topic of several papers and the subject of her London University Ph.D. thesis. In 1936 she came to the London School of Economics to complete it under the supervision of the famous Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Her thesis, *Aboriginal Woman, Sacred and Profane*, was published in 1939 and was hailed as a pioneering work. An Australian Research Fellowship then took her to New Guinea to study the Abelam people, in an area which had only been 'opened to administration' two years earlier, for a twelve-month. She wrote some substantial papers and was then invited to Yale University where she lectured and edited Malinowski's unpublished papers. Though she could well have sat out the war in the United States she returned to London and its air-raids in 1943 and worked on various post-war policy assignments for the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

In 1944 the Nigerian Government asked the International African Institute to organize a study of the social and economic position of women in Southern Cameroons, as it then was. Phyllis was persuaded to drop her plans to return to New Guinea and accept this assignment. This involved two 14-month field trips in 1945-6 and 1947-8. She trekked many hundreds of miles in the then undivided Bamenda Division, including Nggi, Esimbi and Mbembe in her itinerary, before settling down to a more intensive study in NSO',

Soon after she returned from Cameroon she was appointed to a lectureship at University College, London, and prepared her material for

publication while getting up new courses, teaching over a wide field. Her book *Women of the Grassfields* was published in 1952. It was influential in promoting steps to improve the health of women – Elizabeth O’Kelly’s work in self-help and adult education for example – and encouraged work on parallel lines elsewhere.

In 1951 she was promoted to a Readership and with it came a heavy load of teaching and administration. But she was determined to revisit the Grassfields when opportunity offered. In 1958 a Leverhulme Fellowship enabled her to return to Nso’ with her for part of the time came E.M. (Sally) Chilver, a historian who had escaped from the Colonial Office Research Department to Oxford, who was anxious to study colonial administration on the ground before it vanished. In 1960 and 1963, with the help of travel grants, Phyllis returned to undertake a survey of traditional political systems, again with Sally Chilver. Several papers resulted from these research trips, some jointly, as well as a locally published book, *Traditional Bamenda*, first circulated in draft form for comment and criticism to the Federal Ministry of Education, headmasters and many helpers. Phyllis continued to publish until the early ‘seventies despite increasing ill-health, and corresponded frequently with old friends in Cameroon, always hoping to return once more and meanwhile encouraging research in the region. But academic research was by no means her sole interest: the welfare and careers of Cameroonians concerned her too.

Phyllis’s fieldwork in, and publications on, three very different areas were recognized by the award of the Rivers Medal and then the Welcome Medal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, but the honour she most prized was her elevation, in 1958, to the title of Yaa woo Kov by the Fon of Nso’, which made her, as she said, ‘a Nso’ person’.

She died on October 30, 1977. Numerous obituaries followed. Her life was celebrated by a choral memorial service in the London University Church of Christ the King, and later a student prize and lecture were set up in her honour.

In Nso’, the news of her death was received with shock and pain and profusely regretted. There was unanimity that it deserved special treatment. So, after consultation with *ngwerong*, the regulatory society of retainers, and *nggiri*, the society of princes and cadet royals, the Fon of Nso’, Ngga’ Bi’fon II, set aside three days for the mourning and had his emissaries announce it to the Nso’ people through the various traditional channels.

Throughout these three days *ngwerong* and *nggiri* “stood” - jujus or masked

dancers displayed at intervals. The various military lodges, dance groups and societies in and outside the capital, Kimbo', participated fully in the lamentations at the palace. All the participating groups were egged on and lavishly feasted with palm-wine, beer, corn foofoo, fowls and goat-meat by the Fon.

At the end of the three days most Nso' people were pleased that they had fittingly paid their last respects to Yaa woo Kov, who was both Yaa Yeefon and Yaa Yeewong of Kovvifem - Queen Mother for the Nso' royal ancestors and deputy high-priestess of the Nso' ancestral home of Kovvifem. They were pleased that they had done honour to a foreigner who had identified herself with them and their problems and had done much to improve their living standards and those of their children. Their traditional authorities in particular were satisfied that they had fulfilled their promise and honoured their tradition b) handling her death in the same way as that of a *Yaa Yeefon* or *Yaa Yeewong*, a title they had consciously accorded her. Nso' scholars, too, were happy to have witnessed and taken part in the mourning ceremony of someone who had respected their culture, preserved its traditions in writing and had inspired them to endeavour to follow in her footsteps.

Something needs to be said about her personality. She was a smallish person of great energy and zest for life, fond of music and poetry, and with many friends to whom she was fiercely loyal. Her research methods were collaborative rather than inquisitorial; indeed they developed rather along the lines of a free-and-easy seminar or with Phyllis as the attentive pupil of some notable man or woman. To those who could make use of them she sent back notes of the information she had collected, often with a little gift. She quite lost sight of the purely academic aspects of her work while in the field, worrying, rather, about how, one way or another, small improvements could be made to somebody's daily life or to the education of her friends' children in the rural areas. Her dealings were open and frank and she was very tolerant. But there were two things she strongly disliked. One was pretentiousness, and the other was any injustice committed for the sake of expediency, on which she would speak out fearlessly.

In this volume we have included a sample of her work, that of her friend Prudentia Chilla (Jedida Ashe'ri) which complements it. Among the essays by academic colleagues are one by her pupil Dr Ian Fowler (who also undertook the production of this volume on disk), and also papers by those of us who have, in various ways, added to her work, or have been stimulated by it to 'do our own thing'. A list of her papers of Cameroon interest follows.

Publications Relating To The Grassfields By P.K. Kaberry

- 1950 Land Tenure among the Nsaw of the British Cameroons. *Africa*, 20 (4).
- 1952a Nsaw History and Social Categories. *Africa*, 22 (1).
- 1952b *Women of the Grassfields*, H.M. Stationery Office, London. 1957a Myth and Ritual, some recent theories, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, London, 4. ,
- 1957b Primitive States (review article), *British Journal of Sociology*, 8.
- 1959a Nsaw political conceptions, *Man*, LIX:206. 1959b Traditional Politics in Nsaw, *Africa*, 29 (4).
- 1960 Some Problems of Land Tenure in Nso'. *Journal-of African Administration*, 12.
- 1962a The date of the Bamum-Banso War, *Man*, LXII, 20.
- 1962b Retainers and Royal Households in the Cameroon Highlands, *Cahiers d'etudes africaines*, III-II, 10.
- 1969 Witchcraft of the Sun: incest in Nso', in Douglas and Kaberry (eds) *Man in Africa*, London: Tavistock.

Unpublished Material

- a) British Library of Political and Economic Science (LSE)
London. Original fieldnotes, notes from administrative records, and correspondence, with a handlist by David Price.
- b) National Archives, Buea. Quarterly Reports 1945-8; Report on Farmer-Grazier Problems in Nso', 1959.
- c) Epitomes of Kaberry's and joint field notes on particular topics have been compiled by E.M. Chilver for MESIRES and local research groups. These include compilations on Nso' clans, installation rituals (Nso' and Mbot) , on particular groups (Tang-Mbo, Bafreng, Big Babanki, Bum, some Ndop chiefdoms) and a report to the Bali History society.

(With E.M. Chilver)

1960 From Tribute to Tax in a Tikar chiefdom, *Africa*, 30 (1). 1961a (eds.), *The history of customs of Ntem* (pamphlet), Oxford Oxonian Press.

1961b An outline of the traditional political system of Bali-Nyonga, *Africa*, 31 (4).

1962 Traditional Government in Bafut, *Nigerian Field*, 28 (1). 1963a The peoples of Bamenda, *Cameroon Students' Journal*, 1. 1963b Historical Research in Bamenda, *Abbia*, 4.

1965 Sources of the Nineteenth-Century Slave-trade: the Cameroon Highlands, *Journal of African History*, VI (1).

1967 The Kingdom of Kom in west Cameroon, in Forde and Kaberry (eds), *west African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth century*, London:OUP.

1968 *Traditional Bamenda*, Buea: Government Printer.

1970a Chronology of the Bamenda Grassfields, *Journal of African History*,

XI 1970b The Tikar Problem: a non-problem, *Journal of African Languages*, 10.

1974 *western Grassfields (Cameroon Republic) Linguistic Notes*, Occasional Paper No.29, Institute of African studies, Ibadan.

Editor

Introduction

Regional studies provide us with a wider view and make for a better understanding of the forces that help shape the development of areal and ethnic phenomena and histories. They bring into focus the forces that produce conflict or cooperation among the various ethnic groups in the region and ensure their interdependence. But they are very often sketchy and sometimes superficial. On the other hand, areal and ethnic studies or studies on specific topics provide the necessary background for a fruitful comparison and very often delve much deeper into the subject. But they are by their very nature narrow. It is with this background knowledge that, in order to maximize their advantages and minimize their disadvantages, this volume is organized to include regional, areal and ethnic studies and studies on specific topics. The aim is not to provide a single volume with a unifying theme as is the case with most books. It is to provide a book of readings in social history with diverse sections which pursue a large number of different theses.

In section 1, *The Regional Background*, Warnier has established, through the use of linguistic and archaeological data, that western Cameroon, in which Nso' is situated, has been settled for several millennia, very probably continuously, and that its landscapes are very ancient and have resulted from many human and natural forces other than the simple clearance of the forest cover of the region at an uncertain date as some authors have postulated. He has stressed that this thesis runs contrary to that of Ghomsi which has depicted three waves of immigrant settlement of the region, the first two of unspecified dates and the last occurring in the 17th century, a view he has described as a considerable advance over the largely colonial view that a sparsely populated or empty region was settled in about the 17th century by successive waves of migrants. Nkwi has also demonstrated in the same section that the various polities of the Western Grassfields were interdependent and linked to one another in the 19th century through trade, alliances and other diplomatic devices, and that contiguous ones tended to be more hostile to each other and more friendly to less contiguous ones which provided them with specialised or scarce products. The relations among the various polities at the time were thus both friendly and hostile, a view which questions the largely colonial view that the polities of the region lived in a state of anarchy until pacified by the Germans.

In section 2, *Precolonial Studies*, Fowler has demonstrated that Babungu

iron industry was clearly superior to and more efficient than those of Oku and We in terms of labour productivity, technical know-how, and organizational skill; it was over twice as efficient and productive as that of Oku and more than eight times more efficient and productive than that of We. But, while they comparative advantage Babungo technology enjoyed over that of We is certain, that which it enjoyed over Oku technology is uncertain and “might well have been lost altogether in the inherent variability of the productive outcome.” With specific reference to the Oku iron industry, he has shown how local conditions and needs of the iron industry and Oku people fostered the spirit of cooperation among them and thus laid the foundation for the ease with which the Oku people later embraced modern modes of cooperation. Focusing on traditional modes of cooperation, Chem-Langhee has advanced the view that cooperation among individuals for self-betterment, an ancient institution in Nso’, was simple, informal, largely labour-centred, geared towards social welfare, and free from the mismanagement, fraud and crookedness associated with modern modes of cooperation in Nso’, although both modes of cooperation served or are serving the same objective, the maximization of social wellbeing and self-advancement.

From Precolonial studies, the volume moves on to *The Colonial Impact* the focus of section 3. In this section, Niba has shown how Bafut, initially an incorporating fondom, feared by those it subjugated and admired by those who sought its protection, from the outset had unfriendly relations with the Germans who later subdued it humiliatingly and exiled its *Fon* to Duala. But, forced by circumstances, the Germans soon restored its *Fon* and maintained its territorial integrity without actually winning over the Bafut people. On the other hand, Fanso and Chilver have demonstrated that Nso’-German relations were not unfriendly until a German detachment, without genuine cause or provocation, attacked the Nso’ and burnt down: their palace. From that moment the Nso’ developed a deep-seated suspicion and antipathy towards the Germans and avoided all contact with them. Interpreting this attitude as insubordination and unwillingness to accept German rule peacefully, the Germans went to war with them in 1906 and, with the aid of Bamum auxiliaries and Bali Nyonga and Babungo carrier support, defeated and established their hegemony over them. This new situation engendered Nso’ fears and increased their antipathy for the Germans to a point where few Nso’ people shed tears when the “Germans were defeated and expelled from Cameroon during the First World War, although some of them had

come to admire German prowess, hard work and their durable goods. With regard to the issue of native administration, Chilver describes how German initial attempts to administer West Central Cameroons directly encountered problems which forced the Germans to create larger administrative units under the authority of “high chiefs” through who] they tried to rule by delegation. When this new approach engendered new problems, they contemplated adopting the British system of indirect rule but were prevented from doing so by the outbreak of the First World War. British attempts to build on this base also encountered problems as they moved from an interregnum-marked by confused or uncertain administration through the period of Native Administration areas with sole or conciliar Native Authorities to the federal period in which Native Administration areas were amalgamated to form Federations which failed to develop into elected local government bodies because they were by-passed by the new men of education.

Jedida Asheri’s (Mrs Prudentia He’en Chilla’s) autobiography in section 4, *Continuity and Compromise at the Grassroots*, covering a four-year crucial period of her life, 1940-43, during which she passed from 15 to 18 years, is a fascinating and vivid description of Nso’ ; traditional farming operations, methods of initiating young girls int. the farming process, and the experiences of young and adolescent girl who have just completed primary schools and are shopping around for jobs and husbands within the constraints of their parents’ attitudes and the choice between careers. In the same section, Kaberry has argued that the concept of landownership in Nso’ combines moral and legal connotations involving trusteeship and responsibilities. It invests control over residential and arable land in a number of patrilineage heads who have the obligation to provide members of their lineages with residential and farm land, the allocation of which carries with it the implicit assurance of security and ensures that male and female members of the lineage enjoy the rights of usufruct throughout their lives and that a newly-married woman or woman of low status is not penalized insofar as the amount of land to be cultivated is concerned. According to her, this land tenure system is of the utmost importance in understanding the persistence of the lineage in Nso’ as a corporate unit in the face of several undermining factors. Focusing on the formation of families, Lantum discusses the factors which, more often than not, operate in combination to influence and sometimes determine the formation of families in the Jakiri District. But, while the most prominent of them can easily be identified in the case of

some couples, they can be obscure in the case of others.

From *Continuity and Compromise at the Grassroots*, the volume moves to *Continuities at the Palace* in section 5. Here, Mzeka has shown that the number of the wives of the *Fon* of Nso', who are recruited mainly by their colleagues and are self-supporting, has been declining over the years in response to the declining importance of the palace of Nso' as the centre of political, economic and social activity in Nso'. The number of the economic and social units or "houses" into which they are organized has declined from five to four, although they and their titled leaders continue to maintain their status and prestige and to discharge their duties and obligations in the society as heretofore, albeit on a reduced scale. For their part, Chem-Langhee, Fanso and Chilver have described the various sections of the old and new palaces of Nso' and have shown that the rules which, in the past, allowed the *Fon* alone unfettered access to all the sections of the palace and limited access to anyone of them to particular social categories, with limited exceptions which allowed persons to cross a line of social category demarcation, are still in force, although the exceptions are more easily made nowadays. with regard to the issue of power and authority, Fanso and Chem-Langhee have demonstrated that today, as in the past, the death of the *Fon* alone occasions the process of transferring power and authority from one team of leaders in *nto'* Nso' to another. During this process, the new leaders are linked to the Nso' royal ancestors, gods and earth, their persons and offices are made sacrosanct, and the royal powers transferred to the new *Fon* are also retained by his just deceased predecessor, all of which constitute the essence of the whole exercise. According to Chem-Langhee, what holds true of Nso' in this respect also holds true of Ngkar. But there are many perceptual, procedural and material differences between the two situations, differences which suggest that the proverbial assimilation of the Ngkar by the Nso' proper might be more apparent than real and which raise questions as to what happens when two cultures meet and coexist for a long time.

In section 6, *Institutional Changes*, Goheen has examined the ideological underpinnings of the situation of women and land in Nso' and has concluded that the policy which places elite farmers at the centre of national programs for increasing food production is detrimental to the actual cultivators, the overwhelming majority of whom are women, who continue to bear the responsibility of providing food and additional income for the maintenance of their households but are marginalized, impoverished and denied control over productive resources by these changes. For his part, Chem-Langhee has

argued that the Nso' Area Cooperative Union, the first large-scale attempt by the peasants of Nso' to raise and manage capital, offered its members the opportunity for training in economic and financial management and had the potential to improve their economic and social wellbeing and that of the society at large. But in its efforts to expand, its managers overstretched its resources and eroded its financial base. This, in turn, eroded the public confidence which it and the cooperative enterprise as a whole once enjoyed in Nso', a problem it has recognized and has been taking steps since 1981 to redress, although much still remains to be done in this direction.

In the last but one section, *General Persistence*, Chem-Langhee and Fanso have expressed the view that Nso' traditional medical and mortuary concepts and practices are closely interconnected and have lot to do with Nso' perceptions of man and his relationship to Nso' society, earth, ancestors and God. They have stressed that, today, as in the past, traditional medicine in Nso' consoles the living, reconciles them with the otherworld, induces them to respect the laws and customs and ethical norms of their land and society, harmonizes them with their natural environment, and assures them of a respected place in the society, despite undermining forces. For his part, Banadzem shows that, in spite of foreign influences such as Christianity and Islam, the Nso' remain attached to their own concept of death, afterlife and funerary practices, which have escaped total corrosion, even though they are encumbered by numerous paradoxes. He stresses, too, that these concepts and practices are best studied through participant observation rather than through questionnaires and oral interviews, although these methods are not to be ignored.

In the last section, *Ideology and Conflict*, Goheen has shown how colonial tax policies and the mid-1970s land ordinances of Cameroon conflicted with the ideology which governed tribute and land tenure systems in Nso' and produced differing perceptions in the minds of the *Fon* of Nso' on the one hand and his sub-chiefs on the other, in ways unintended by the policy-makers. The outcome of all this has been a conflict over authority and access to resources between the *Fon* and his sub-chiefs and a weakening of the authority of the *Fon* over his sub-chiefs. However, the *Fon* continues to be the paramount *Fon* of his kingdom, control over and access to land continue to depend on social identity and to be a central symbol of leadership in Nso', and access to land continues to be a right of Nso' citizenship.

Admittedly, there is no overt unifying theme in this volume, its geographical location apart. This is to be expected of a book of readings.

Nevertheless, Warnier's and Nkwi's contributions that put into question three colonial and non-colonial theses have enhanced our knowledge of the pre-colonial history of the region. Their importance cannot therefore be overemphasized. Nor can we minimize the contributions of Fowler and Chem-Langhee which have shown how local conditions and the needs of the Oku and Nso' peoples fostered the spirit and practice of cooperative ventures in the pre-colonial period, which provided the driving force and the ideological and structural underpinnings for the successful and smooth introduction of modern modes of cooperation in the area during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Aside from these four studies with their unique characters, the rest of the studies have a unifying theme or thesis, namely, that despite the entry and assault of external, influences, particularly those associated with colonialism, Christianity and Islam, the traditional institutions, customs and value systems of the Nso' and their neighbours have resisted major change and their total corrosion is not yet in sight.

Finally, many viewpoints have been presented in the volume to illustrate the proposition that historical research is a continuous process of rediscovery which provides new questions, and also that the evidence of other disciplines—linguistics, archaeology and palaeobotany for example—may give *rise* to many new lines of inquiry and help to correct the documentary record and explain oral tradition. Herein lies the most important element of this experimental collection. Its editors hope that it will provoke other similar collections.

Editors

The History Of The Peopling Of Western Cameroon And The Genesis Of Its Landscapes¹

JEAN-PIERRE WARNIER*

Not so long ago the generally accepted opinion, summarized by Ghomsi,² was that the high plateaux or Grassfields of Western Cameroon had been peopled, in succession, by a very ancient stock whose presence was evidenced by archaeological finds, then by a less ancient stock, composed of more or less scattered populations speaking languages akin to those spoken nowadays and finally by a recent stock (dated to about the seventeenth century) of migrants, arriving in successive waves from the north-east ('Ndobo-Tikari' country), the West ('Widekum' country), or, for the Aghem, from the north-west ('Munshi' country). The largest group of these supposed migrants, that is the so-called 'Tikar', were said to be the founders of the Bamileke, Bamum, Nso', Kom and Bafut chiefdoms. In the absence of certain evidence about the history of the peopling of the region, there were various conjectures current about the creation of its landscapes, concerning which it was agreed that they were derived from the original forest cover by clearance at a period difficult to put a date to.

At that time archaeological data hardly existed, but were not wholly absent. Jeffreys, following Migeod, had collected numerous basalt stone implements in the Bamenda region and suspected the existence of an ancient 'Neolithic agricultural' population which he mentioned in several publications,³ following which the British archaeologist Hartle made a reconnaissance⁴ which confirmed Jeffreys' opinion; it was confirmed anew by Marliac⁵ and David.⁶ Linguistic data, and in particular the genetic classification of languages, which can supply population historians with valuable clues, were also barely in existence, though not entirely absent. Richardson had published some in 1957, to which Voorhoeve⁷ and Williamson⁸ had added further information. The view summarized by

* Reprinted from the *Journal of African History* 25 (1984), pp.395-410, by kind permission of Professor Warnier and the Cambridge University Press, whose copyright it remains.

Ghomsî was a considerable advance over those presented in earlier publications – principally in works by colonial administrators such as Delarozier – which one can find graphically condensed in Champaud's Atlas,⁹ in which successive 'waves' of migrants are depicted as moving to the assault of the mountains – then supposedly sparsely peopled or not peopled at all – in about the seventeenth century.

The synthesis proposed by Tardits in 1973,¹⁰ on the occasion of a conference on the history of Cameroon civilisations, gave an account of the uncertainties that marred current opinions on the history of population groups. These rested on weak sources, namely oral traditions, and not any or all of them at that. Those in question had been almost exclusively collected from royal lineages and not from all sections of the population, commoner lineages in particular. Moreover these traditions had not been compared, either, with the data of archaeology or those of historical linguistics, sparse as these then were. Tardits, supported by the opinions expressed by Kaberry and Chilver and by phytogeographical, archaeological and linguistic data, stressed the contribution of ancient settlement and relativized the historical value of oral traditions of migration in favour of the political meanings they conveyed.

By 1984 the situation had become quite different; one can now state categorically that the Grassfields have been peopled for several millennia, very probably continuously, and that the beginnings of the humanized landscapes familiar to us today are very ancient. These conclusions are the necessary consequence of the linguistic and archaeological data accumulated over the last five years.

Do Languages Bear Witness to Ancient and Continuous Human Settlement?

In 1973 some fifteen linguists of different nationalities formed themselves into a Working Group in Grassfields Bantu (the GBWG) under the direction of L. Hyman and J. Voorhoeve. A strong impetus was given to their work in 1977 by a conference, financed by the CNRS and conducted by the GBWG, which took the expansion of the Bantu as its theme and which published its proceedings, edited by L. Hyman, J. Voorhoeve and L. Bouquiaux, in 1980.¹¹ In the following years the work of the group concentrated upon about fifty Grassfields dialects, selected from the plateau area as a Whole, with the aim of proposing genetic classification for them, reconstructing the 'proto-languages' of the groups they fell into and establishing their degree of relationship to common Bantu. For what follows

I rely on a report by Hombert,¹² a publication by Stallcup,¹³ and personal communications from J. Leroy. All the Grassfields languages are genetically related to one another and share between 55 and 100 percent of their basic vocabulary. Four groups can be distinguished among them: Mbam-Nkam (e.g. Bamileke, Bamum and Nggemba), Momo (e.g. Assaka, Ambele, Nggwo, Mogamo, Menemo), Ring (e.g. Nso', Babungu, We, Kom) and the Metchum group)

Furthermore, these languages display a characteristic which is of importance to population historians: they are diversified and very numerous in relation to the land area in which they are spoken. In other words, the density and the diversity of the Grassfields languages is high – indeed the highest on the African continent. Now, according to the linguists, this situation can only be the result of a long history of diversification on the spot. If you press linguists to give figures, they tell you that the time-depth is to be measured in millennia, but refuse to say how many.

The studies made by the GBWG satisfy the requirements of Greenberg's method of genetic classification, save in one respect. The Grassfields, in fact, are criss-crossed by very active trade networks and have been so for a very long time, so that one cannot say that the languages were totally isolated from each other. The percentage of common roots could reflect a relexification of the basic vocabulary just as much as a common genetic base. I have discussed the methodological and historical implications of this situation in a paper the interested reader can refer to.¹⁴ The hypothesis of a relexification of the basic vocabulary of Grassfields languages is reinforced by the fact that genetic classifications obtained from the basic vocabularies of Grassfields languages differ appreciably from those obtained by means of a comparison of grammatical characteristics; this raises historical problems which I have discussed in another paper.¹⁵ In short, this phenomenon can only be explained by an intermixture of populations within and around the Grassfields.

Suppose, now, that the percentages of common roots do adequately commemorate the degree of genetic relationship between them, could one calculate the length of a time which would have been required to arrive at the linguistic diversity observable in the Grassfields? This is the question that glottochronology attempts to answer. Swadesh and the Europeanists have relied on a rate of 80 percent of basic vocabulary retention per millennium a rate which could be verified, more or less, from written documents. But Carnochan¹⁶ rightly observes that there is no good reason to suppose that retention rates are the same in African as in European languages. If they were the same one would have to estimate that some 3,000 years have passed to

arrive at the situation in the Grassfields. But, as both Carnochan and David¹⁷ stress, nothing allows us to presume that retention rates are actually uniform.

Did the linguistic differentiation happen on the spot or in the course of migrations? In Greenberg's view¹⁸ the Bantu languages originated in the area stretching from the Benue to the Grassfields, an area which thus becomes an ancient cradle-land of peoples, for two reasons: (1) it is the area of maximum diversification of Bantu languages and of those closely related to Bantu; (2) it is the meeting-point between the Benue-Congo group (to which Bantu belongs) and other groups also belonging to the larger Niger-Congo-Kordofanian family. Grzymski,¹⁹ however, has warned the historians of Africa against the blind application of the principle of maximum diversity. In the course of his plea for caution he cites, in particular, the hypothesis of the origins of Bantu in Cameroon. In the Grassfields case, there is an argument in favour of a lengthy evolution on the spot. This is the remarkable correlation that exists between (a) the geographical limit of the plateaux, represented by the 900m. contour line, (b) the boundary of related languages within the Grassfields languages which are closer to one another than to all neighbouring languages, and (c) the area in which one finds a specific socio-political organization—the chiefdom, more or less state-like based on a lineage organization, centred on a *fon* or *mfe* controlled societies with custom-maintaining functions. This correlation suggests that the Grassfields, as a geographical unit, provided the frame for specific linguistic, economic and socio-cultural evolution. This is what makes me think that, without excluding some mixing of peoples, this evolution essentially concerned peoples in continuous occupation of the high plateaux.

Before proceeding to conclusions, let us note a last significant contribution from linguistic studies: Tikar and the languages of the Mbam-Nkam group (Bamileke, Bamum, Nggemba) only share 20 percent of their basic vocabulary. The closest relationships of the Grassfield languages are to the east (33 percent of Mbam-Nkam roots shared with Banen), to the south (46 percent shared with Bandem) and the south-west (30 percent with Ekoid). In any event the Grassfields languages are clearly Bantu in the case of Mbam-Nkam and gradually distance themselves from Bantu as one moves westward.

So what conclusions can be drawn from linguistic data? That the *whole* region between the Benue and the Atlantic coast was anciently settled that its peopling is counted in terms of millennia, though how many is unknown; that, in general, this human occupation was continuous, especially on the high plateaux (though there is no proof that there were not empty zones at one period or another); that there was a significant mixing of peoples; that

the latter took place in many directions; that the peoples of the high plateaux are linguistically closer to those settled between the Banen and the Ekoids than they to the Tikar, Mambila and Jukunoids. This is, at the same time, a lot and a little. A little in the sense that these data do not convey absolute certainties. But a lot to the extent that these hypotheses are capable of some initial confirmation if they are set against oral tradition and the contributions of archaeology.

Oral Traditions as Indicators of Political Relations

Let us return now to oral traditions about migrations. And let us undertake a first exercise which consists of questioning the commoner lineages which, let us not forget, form the bulk of the population chiefdoms except in those cases where the dynastic lineage has ingested the whole population (as was the case in Bamum, for example). And let us observe the rules of the ethnographic game in doing so by not asking informants the loaded question 'Where do you come from?' But instead *collecting genealogies* and letting them speak for themselves. I undertook this exercise first in Mankon, then generally on the Bamenda plateau, as can be seen in two works of mine.

Here is the outcome: (1) the populations of the high plateau moved in every direction. Chiefdoms never ceased from exchanging their inhabitants. The majority of the genealogies harked back to a local origin or to one in a nearby chiefdom. The migrations they bear witness to are micro-migrations without any directional pattern. (2) On the other hand the genealogies of men of title and of dynastic lineages implied kinship links between them or referred to a common prestigious ancestor. Since lineages and ancestors are necessarily localized these relationships, real or imagined, were translated into the terms of migratory movements. (3) All oral traditions concerning the migration of men of title have a political message: they connote either the legitimacy of a notable's powers within his lineage or that of a Fon within his fendom, or refer to external political relations. Faced with such oral traditions the ethnohistorian is led to put forward the hypothesis that they do not necessarily refer to *real* migrations but that, rather, they express the local and regional distribution of power. This hypothesis, already advanced by Tardits,²¹ is hard to verify in our present state of knowledge, even though the linguistic evidence supplies a strong presumption in its favour. It is not impossible that, one day, archaeology may be able to deny or confirm it.

Archaeological Data Prove the Antiquity of the Population

Since 1974 I have carried out surveys with a view to finding stratified archaeological sites, rock-shelters in particular. These surveys resulted, successively, in the 'discovery' of the rock shelters of Shum Laka of Bafotchu-Mbu' with a surface area of 800m², of Abeke at Akum, with a surface area of about 1,000m², of Fiye Nkwi at Babanki Tunggo (surface area C.7,000m²) and at Mbi crater (surface area 700m²). Morin² has given a geomorphological description of the last three. In 1978 Maret and Warnier dug a test-pit at Shum Lakai the radiocarbon dates from this dig, published by Maret²³, are stratigraphically coherent and indicate a human presence in this region between the beginning of the seventh and the end of the fourth millennium BC. In subsequent years Maret continued his excavations at Shum Laka and the dates suggest a human presence at later though still uncertain periods. In 1981 Asombang discovered a burial, neither studied nor dated as yet.

Abeke shelters a stone-chipping workshop using rhyolite. The implement types run from the Mousterian-Levalloisian to early trials with microliths. An excavation by Maret has provided a dating in the middle of the fourth millennium BC.

Fiye Nkwi, despite its huge size, is unpropitious to archaeological deposits. This rock-shelter has, however, been the object of a dig by Asombang which has yielded implements very similar to those at Abeke and Mbi crater.

By contrast the rock-shelter at Mbi crater, sited at an altitude of 2,080m on the western flank of the explosion crater of Mbi, is the most promising site. Since January 1982 Raymond Asombang (personal communication) has undertaken excavations there, opening a trench some 12m long, which has yielded abundant and well-stratified lithic and bone material. He has also discovered a burial which, to judge from the stratigraphic level and associated material, is probably contemporary with the oldest Shum Laka period. The burial is that of young female adult of normal proportions, but very short (about 130-140cm.). The bone remains (in a very poor state) have not yet been studied. But at first glance they appear to be of an individual of negroid type. The upper levels include pottery. The material of this excavation thus covers a period which certainly runs from the upper palaeolithic to 'Neolithic', and even perhaps to the Iron Age. It is still being studied and will certainly revolutionize our knowledge of the region.

Let us also note the presence of megaliths at Sa, north of Nkambe, and the discovery of 18 polished stone axes at Fundong in North-West Province,

and of another such at Bapa, near Bafoussam.

What can we make of this? The linguistic data point to a continuous history, over several millennia, accompanied by some intermixture of peoples. But there is no proof that this took place entirely on the high plateaux. On the other hand, the archaeological data attest to the presence of a human population for at least nine millennia. But nothing in the archaeological record proves that this presence was continuous. Be that as it may, the two categories of data distinctly reinforce each other and offer support to the proposition of a very ancient, continuous human occupation, accompanied by mixing of populations. But one must beware of regarding it as firmly established. And finally one must point out that while the archaeological data for the North-West Province are rapidly accumulating they are entirely lacking, so far, for the West Province, a few surface finds apart.

Deforestation

Hawkins and Brunt²⁶, Letouzey²⁷, and the geographers who have followed up their studies, such as Dongmo²⁸, consider that the vegetational cover of the high plateaux is derived from montane forest formations and the Biafran forest and that deforestation and reforestation with fruiting trees (*Dacryodes edulis*, *Canarium schweinfurthii*, *Cola nitida* and *c. acuminata* etc.) or with trees and bushes of economic interest, are due to human action. They base their views on the existence of some remaining fragments of primeval vegetation, on the nature of derived associations and on 'the zonal schemata of climate as modified by altitude. There have been no palynological or palaeozoological analyses to confirm their opinion. On the other hand, the find of a tooth of a gorilla (a forest specie at Shum Laka would seem to confirm this hypothesis. It is congruent with the climatic sequences of the last 20,000 years, which have been marked by maxima of temperature and rainfall about 10,000 years ago accompanied by the northward advance of the Biafran forest.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the Grassfields were deforested and that the present-day landscape is very largely the consequence of human activity. Could we then derive hypotheses concerning the chronology and impact of this activity? The factors we must take into consideration are as follows: the practice of slash-and-burn horticulture and the stages of agricultural development, demographic phenomena, regional economic specialization, the introduction of iron-working, and population movements.

Grassfields horticulture is grounded on the cultivation of an ancient store of African cultigens: sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), bulrush millet (*Pennisetum americanum*), cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*), bambarra nut (*Voandzeia subterranea*), yams (*Dioscorea cayenensis* and *D. rotundata*), oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), kola (*Cola nitida*, *C. acuminata*), raffia (*Raphia farinifera*) and some vegetables - *Hibiscus esculentus* or okra, *Telfaria occidentalis*, a type of pumpkin, *Cucumeropsis edulis* or egusi, *Lagenaria siceraria* or gourd, *Aframomum malagueta* or malagueta pepper. We have at present no direct means of dating the introduction of this plant association to the Grassfields.

Thurstan Shaw²⁹ has observed that the highest densities of population in sub-Saharan Africa are to be found where the cultivation of yams is associated with that of the oil palm, which have complementary nutritional values. He sees in this association an indicator of a focus of human settlement. This high density zone is centred in Igbo country. It extends to the middle Benue, into Tiv and Idoma country, and includes the Grassfields where the consumption of palm-oil is strongly rooted in the culture, and in ritual and eating habits. On the basis of indirect evidence (pottery, polished stone axes, and the tool-making industry of the Late Stone Age) Shaw dates the start of this complex to at least five millennia ago. According to de Maret³⁰ pottery makes its appearance at Shum Laka a little after the sixth millennium ended. So I am tempted to adopt this broad dating *by way of hypothesis* as the *terminus a quo* of the introduction of horticulture into the Grassfields. A convergent pointer, provided by Williamson³¹ and accepted by Shaw³², comes to us from comparative linguistics, namely that the distribution of the roots for the words designating raffia, oil-palm, yams and kola is such that it suggests that their cultivation harks back to proto-Niger-Congo and thus points towards a time-lapse of four millennia at the very least. One notices that these species still play a central part in the Grassfields economy.

The next stage of agricultural development is marked by the introduction of cultigens from south-East Asia, namely the plantain (*Musa sapientum* var *paradisica*), the banana (*Musa sapientum*), the taro (*Colocasia esculentum*), and another variety of yam (*Dioscorea alata*). The introduction of this complex to Africa is dated to the early centuries of our era. We have no means of dating its introduction to the Grassfields, but it must be very long ago to judge from the importance of the banana tree in rituals and food habits.

The introduction of American cultigens, subsequent to 1500 AD, is easier to date. It looks as if the first two species to be adopted were the groundnut (*Arachis hypogaea*) and the tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum*). The latter was certainly cultivated before the start of the nineteenth century since

tobacco pipes are to be found on sites which, according to oral tradition, were abandoned under the impact of Chamba raids (c.1825-30). It is probable that, in coming years, it will become possible to arrive at a closer dating. Oral tradition and linguistic data allow us to date the introduction of maize to the middle of the nineteenth century for the north-western Grassfields: came by two routes, via the valley of the Cross River and that of the Benue. The diffusion of manioc (cassava) can be quite precisely date to 1918-20 as a consequence of the shortages of farm labour which accompanied colonization and the epidemic of Spanish influenza.

Groundnuts and maize must have played an important part in agricultural development and, consequentially, in population increase. Both of these species have a short growing season (of about three months) and thus enabled some weeks to be cut off the annual period food shortage during the gap before the new harvests. Groundnuts, rich in lipids and proteins, had improved nutrition and, since they are leguminous plants, played an important part in rotation and the maintenance of soil fertility.

Throughout the plateau area food is grown nowadays, as it was in the 'Neolithic' and Iron Ages, by gardening over the trash of forest and savanna clearance reduced to ashes by burning. During the 'Neolithic period cultivation was done with digging sticks and what seems to have been an agricultural tool chipped from basalt (a 'hoe' and pick), and later on with an iron hoe. As the forest was felled it gave way to mixed plots of cultivation alternating with grass fallow principally of *Hyparrhenia*, and spear grass (*Imperata*) on poorer soils. The annual bush fires, linked to both hunting and bush clearance, combined with long-term trend towards more arid conditions, interrupted by wetter periods, over the last four millennia, have maintained the grassy cover except on south-west facing hill slopes, which have a higher rainfall and are more wooded than others. Traditionally bush fires were spread out between December and March. Nowadays, since Fulani graziers want to burn the dry grass as soon as possible, the grass is burned before the end of January. The impact on the vegetational cover is bound to have different results in each case, since the effect of late dry-season fires was to eliminate low shrubs.

The effect of cultivation on the environment depends on population densities. These, at the end of the nineteenth century, were very unequal - low in Bamum - 8 to 10 inhabitants per km² according to Tardits³³ - high in Bamileke country (30 to 40 per km²) and more or less the same on the average in what is now the North-West Province with the highest density of 80 per km² in Nggi country. There were also thinly populated areas, like the Metchum valley and some which despite their fertility, are curiously

underpeopled, like the Wum plateau. Can one give a rough idea of population density and settlement patterns in the past? I agree with Caldwell³⁴ that extrapolations from contemporary figures, on the basis of likely demographic growth, are worthless. For such estimations one can only base oneself on (1) a map and periodisation of archaeological sites, and (2) on a history of agricultural techniques and, in particular, a list, for each period, of the species cultivated.

No map of archaeological sites has yet been completed. But the following observations will at least enable us to put precise questions. Firstly, one picks up, on the surface, basalt stone implements all over the North-West Province at every altitude up to over 2,000m, and in all districts, even those at present uninhabited. What is striking is the abundance of these, implements. Jeffreys claims to have picked up over a thousand hand-axes. I personally scarcely ever made a day's journey without picking up two or three items. If these implements are indeed 'neolithic' as Jeffreys, Hartle, Marliac and David all think, one is driven to the conclusion that, from the beginnings of horticulture, the high plateau areas (or at least those in the North-West Province) were subjected to forest clearance. Boserup³⁵ has already pointed out that cultivators, when population density does not compel them either to cultivate the fallow or practice rotation, prefer to clear the forests with their richer soil. It is only when the forests have been more or less felled that people turn to cultivating fallow lands. One can thus put forward the hypothesis, which remains to be verified, of a pretty extensive forest clearance, from the 'Neolithic' onwards, due to an itinerant horticulture on a slash-and-burn basis, followed by long-term settlement in some tracts with the adoption of a system of alternating fallow and cultivation. Morin (personal communication) thinks that this hypothesis looks like starting to be confirmed to some degree since the river terraces in the North-West Province display a horizon of ash fossilized at an ancient soil level and thus bear witness to a period of forest clearance (this horizon should be dated before long). The factors which played a part in the choice of, as it were, 'permanent' habitats may be guessed at: the best agricultural soils were preferred, to wit, for the North-West Province the colluvial soils of the Ndop Plain, the humus-rich soils of the high lava plateau, and the volcanic soils of the Wum plateau. Habitats at high altitude were abandoned in favour of land situated at up to 1,500m, very occasionally higher. Finally the development of regional economic specialization (which we shall return to) may have induced regroupment of population in sites which favoured the development of production and exchange, around the main crossroads of commerce and centres of growth.

The introduction of the Asiatic complex of cultigens, which was certainly more or less coeval with the introduction of iron ,metallurgy, must have both responded to demographic increase and been instrumental in provoking further population growth. The sites I excavated at Fundong in 1982 are Iron Age sites (but eighteen polished stone axes were found 20m distant from one of them) but seem to belong to a period prior to the diffusion of American cultigens and to the corresponding technical and demographic history of this period. These sites suggest a substantial but dispersed population on the Fundong plateau in a region which, to judge by Kom oral tradition and Moisel's map,³⁶ was practically denuded of inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth century.

The introduction of American cultigens, groundnuts in particular, no doubt contributed to a new spurt of demographic growth. Probably it first took place in the Bamileke region, linked to Duala by long-distance trade from the middle of the seventeenth century or even earlier, perhaps: this would help to explain the demographic and cultural lag between the Bamileke region and the rest of the high plateaux. In the Bamenda region, where oral tradition correspond all respects with the material evidence of human occupation before main Chamba raids (c.1825-30) one can reconstitute, with certain map displaying a dense (20 to 40 inhabitants per km²) but dispel settlement pattern, in opposition to what is observable in the nineteenth century. One could say the same for the Ndop Plain.

I had long been intrigued by the groups of terrace habitats at 2,000m in altitude in places difficult of access around the Ndop and up to Kom, where one can see several hundred along the escape facing the Fon's palace at Laikom. A dig at one of these sites, in 1980 above the Sabga pass, convinced me, on account of the a pottery we uncovered, that we had to do with sites datable to a 1800, almost certainly refuge sites occupied at the start of the Chamba raids at the turn of the nineteenth century. This hypothesis receives some support from the accounts given by those slaves, as a result of these raids, who acted as the informants of the missionary linguist Koelle; these accounts, like the oral tradition collected, describe the panic which took hold of the region's inhabitants and the dispersal of villages and hamlets. If this hypothesis could be verified, one could, by means of a simple totting-up of the terraces and by comparisons with modern 'traditional' settlement, arrive at an approximate notion of the population of the Ndop Plain at the time of the raids. At first it seems to have been at least equal to that at the end of the nineteenth century. This second occupation of the higher land (second after their 'neolithic' occupation) could have given occasion f second felling of high montane forest.

Let us return now to the regional economic specialization mentioned earlier. In the eighteenth, and to a certain extent in the nineteenth, century the high plateaux were characterized by a developed regional economic specialization, accompanied by mercantile exchanges. P was produced in the lower lands on the periphery of the high plateau and exchanged there for root vegetables, grain and pulses, small and craft products. The localization of production between the periphery and the centre took place broadly in the order mentioned above, as a function of increasing distance from the palm-belts the weight/value ratios of the goods carried for the purposes of trade. This specialization apparently took place in accordance with Ricardo's law of comparative costs, as I try to show in another work.³⁸ Its importance in landscape formation has been considered. The oil-palm belts are all peripheral to the Grassfields: in the valley of the Upper Nkam, between the Nkam and the Nun, in the Mbam valley, in that of the Donga, Katsina Ala and Metchum, in the 11 lands of the Nggi, Mogamo, Bangwa and Banyang in the Cross River basin. Elsewhere the oil-palm is rarely present in quantity, not because of ecological reasons in the main, but chiefly for economic ones. On the other hand, it is the rearing of small stock and the cultivation of legumes and cereals (groundnuts, cowpeas, sorghum and maize) which have given the plateaux their typical appearance: open country as in parts of the Bamenda plateau, the Ndop Plain, the Nso' region, where small stock were freely pastured on fallow or tracts remote from cultivation; bocage country as in Bamileke or in the heavily settled areas of the Bamenda plateau, where small stock were freely pastured in the uncultivated uplands or in alternation with intensive cultivation in farmlands enclosed by live hedges or barriers of raffia midribs. Bocage here implies that stock-rearing and intensive cultivation was undertaken with an eye to trade.

Economic specialization and regional trade in tandem with long-distance trade had another impact on the landscape through their combined influence on the localization of the population. This complex of commercial exchanges gave rise to centres of economic and demographic growth which were reinforced at the expense of their peripheries. For example, it was thus that the Metchum valley was partially emptied of inhabitants by the implosion of Bafut. The development of the Kingdom of Bamum and the depopulation of its borderlands at the start of the nineteenth century is perhaps to be explained by the same kind of process. The result was a local population concentration and a reshaping of the landscape, exemplified by the regrowth of forest in part of the Metchum valley, the shift of oil-palm stands into Bafut territory, and the abandonment of no man's lands in Bamum.

Iron-working was an important component of regional exchanges.

David³⁹ considers that it was introduced into the Grassfields some two millennia ago, perhaps a little more. The recent excavations I made in Fundong (in Kom, see note 36) show that it was already established in this area in the middle of the first millennium AD. The sites at Fundong and the slag dispersed from Bambui to Bali, on the western flank of the range which separates the Bamenda plateau from the Ndop plain, suggests that there was a time when iron-working sites were situated closer to the palm-belts than they came to be in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At that time the most active centres were at Isu and We and in the area surrounding the Ndop Plain. There was then a movement of geographical and industrial concentration in the course of these two centuries, to such a degree that one can today find more than 200, 000m³ of slag in three Ndop Plain villages (Babungo, Bamessing and Bamenyam) with at least 250 smelting sites. What is in question, then, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the presence of a sedentary industry of large capacity directed to export – and this in a savanna milieu. It has been described by Warnier and Fowler.⁴⁰

It must have borne heavily on the environment. In a well-documented article Goucher⁴¹ has tried to calculate the environmental effect of iron-working for all the West African metal-working industries. Basing herself on researches in Dapaa in Ghana, she calculates that 2,000m³ of slag requires the production of 2,000m³ of carcoal, or the felling of about 300,000 stems of *Burkea Africana*. On the basis of these estimates (which Goucher qualifies as conservative) the 200,000m³ of slag of Babungo, Bamessing and Bamenyam represent the felling of 30 million stems of savanna species.

The techniques used reflect a shortage of timber: the high furnaces were massive constructions which stored heat within their inner walls and were used uninterruptedly day after day to conserve energy. An ample use of kaolin in their construction and inner lining gave refractory properties. Forced and preheated ventilation using tuyeres, and the prior drying of ore allowed high temperatures reached while consuming a minimum of energy and producing iron with good mechanical properties. The techniques used at the iron-working sites at Fundong are different. To judge by the s: the cakes of slag the high furnaces were much smaller than that of Ndop. The fact that no trace of them has been found suggests that they were modest and perishable constructions. It seems probable the of the sites belong to a period before the energy crisis to which the Ndop industry bears witness and one can perhaps hypothesize a first phase of iron-working when it was relatively dispersed and when combustible materials were sufficiently available to require no constraints in usage. The second phase was marked by the concentration of metallurgy at the centre of the plateaux, a considerable

development of its production, followed by deforestation and the perfecting of smelting techniques designed to mitigate energy shortages, especially in the Ndop Plain where the climate is drier than elsewhere.

The iron goods of Oku and Nso' were exported to the middle Belt exchange for cloth and salt. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century the trade in kola developed following the advance of the so-called 'Hausa' caravans. The chiefdoms of Kom, Nso', Oku and others, including in Bamileke the chiefdoms of Bangwa and Bangou entered into the kola export trade and planted thousands of trees. The replanting continued into the British colonial period in the 'Bamenda Grassfields'. In Oku kola vied with iron goods as an export while metallurgy went into decline: no doubt some forest regeneration followed (but latterly it has been destroyed).

The last factor to bear in mind is that of population movement have already mentioned those related to regional trade – the concentrations in areas of high production (the Nggi oil palm the Ndop area of craft and metallurgical production), and in centres of economic growth (for example, the large chiefdoms of Bafut, and Bali upon the Bamenda Plateau), and the depopulation of certain areas as a result of the phenomena of implosion.

Superimposing themselves upon these movements, the Chamba raid also helped to alter the map. They induced concentrations of population in the Ndop Plain and on the Bamenda Plateau and no contributed to the depopulation of the northern Grassfields and direct contact with the Takum region in which the Chamba had s in considerable numbers. The story of these raids can be found works of Chilver,⁴² Chilver and Kaberry,⁴³ and Fardon.⁴⁴

From 1840, and after the conquest of Adamawa by the Fulani, f the proclamation of the Jihad, the north-eastern Grassfields (the Ndop area, the Ndu area for example) suffered from repeated raids launched from Banyo and Gashaka. More detail on these raids is given in the sources dealing with the Chamba. Paradoxically these raids which created depopulated areas in the northern Grassfields from Wum to the Mambila plateau will have doubtless also prevented replanting of anthropic origin. In fact, well-watered slopes apart, eroded areas are often (not always) made up of protected species (such as raffia, oil palm, and *Phoenix reclinata*) or deliberately planted Jones (*Dracaena arborea*, kola, *Ficus*, *Markhamia tomentosa*). One can take stock of this situation from aerial photographs, or more simply by looking down on the Ndop Plain or the Bamenda Plateau from a neighbouring cliff-top in clear weather: the most wooded regions are precisely those which are the most densely settled, leaving aside gallery forests and the remnants of primeval forest.

The last movement of population which has affected the landscape is the

arrival of Fulani graziers, from 1916, the date of the settlement of Ardo Sabga. Champaud⁴⁵ tells us that from 10,000 in 1924, the bovine population increased to 244,000 in 1968 in the North-West province. The impact of cattle rearing on the environment has been threefold: it has supplanted the abundant natural fauna which inhabited the savanna; it has, at higher levels, replaced the *hyparrhenia* by a *Sporobolus* savanna; it has certainly contributed to the transformation of the former grassy to a shrubby savanna by reason of the practice of firing the bush at the start of the dry season.

Recapitulation

This synthesis is no less speculative than that proposed by Tardits ten years ago and published in 1981.⁴⁶ It reinforces the trend in the historiography of the last twenty years by putting more and more emphasis on the ancient and continuous settlement of the high plateaux, at the expense of the contribution of recent migrations.

The hypotheses I have advanced on the basis of archaeological evidence, linguistic classification and regional economic history can be recapitulated as follows: at the upper palaeolithic level the high plateaux were already occupied by a population of negroid type. Some six millennia or so ago horticulture on a slash-and-burn basis was introduced, giving rise to the first deforestation, while a long-term aridification and the practice of bush fires maintained a grass cover on fallow. This population of horticulturists spoke proto-Benue-Congo languages, doubtless close to proto-Bantu. Multidirectional mixing and several millennia of diversification produced the complex situation we have today. Some 2,000 years ago iron-working and then Asiatic cultigens were introduced, giving rise to demographic growth and an intensification of forest clearance and, eventually, to a regional structuring of production and exchange.

The diffusion of American cultigens tended to reinforce demographic growth from the seventeenth century onwards, first in the Bamileke region, then in the rest of the high plateau area while specialized production (palm oil, cereals and pulses, small stock, crafts) imposed the characteristics we can still recognize in the regional landscapes – open farmland, savanna, bocage, palm-belts.

Population movements linked to regional trade, and to the Chamba and Fulani raids remodelled the settlement map by creating human concentrations contrasting with peripheral empty areas which even either towards regenerated forest or to a shrubby or a grassy Se in accordance with local ecological factors.

I strongly emphasize the hypothetical nature of this reconstruction. It will have made its point if it does not lead to a new orthodoxy but rather to a different reading of the mountain landscapes of Western Cameroon, and away from the well-trodden paths of oral tradition confronting them with further questions concerning languages, archaeological evidence, the environment and economic history. On the language side a huge comparative task remains to be done, especially on the vocabulary. The archaeological evidence – it is now clear – is extremely abundant. The study of the palaeo-environment – arrived at by palynological analysis and the identification of the fauna at different periods – should be able to give us a historical geography of the Grassfields landscapes. Finally, the history of production exchange, reconstructed on the basis of oral tradition, material culture, contemporary economic organization and archaeological sites is capable of adding a good deal more information to the history of settlement.

To be complete, this study should mention the modifications to landscape which have taken place during the period of European colonial rule and since independence: further deforestation, the disintegration of the Bamileke bocage during the troubles linked, independence (since when it has been reconstituted here and there), the introduction of cash crops, of new cultigens, new tree species (*Eucalyptus* in particular), the introduction of cattle husbandry intense demographic pressure, leading to over-utilization of la environmental degradation. I mention these factors only to draw attention to the differences between the nineteenth century landscape and the contemporary one. A study of the factors which have given rise to these differences is beyond the scope of this paper.

Endnotes and References

1. A first version of this paper was presented as a communication to a conference on 'Man and the tropical highlands' organized by the Society for the Study, Protection and Conservation of Nature in Inter-Tropical Regions (SEPANRIT), which took place in Yaounde from 31 March to 15 April in 1983.

2. E. Ghoms, *Les Bamileke du Cameroun: Essai d'etude historique des origines a 1920*. Doctoral thesis, 3eme cycle, Paris, 1972, p.65.

3. M.D.W. Jeffreys, 'Neolithic stone implements (Bamenda, British

Cameroons', *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, 13, 1951, p.1203; 'Stone implements from Sabga mineral spring, West Cameroon', *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 2 (1972), pp.114-8.

4. D.O. Hartle, 'An archaeological survey in West Cameroon', *West African Archaeological Newsletter*, 11 (1969), pp.35-9.

5. A. Marliac, 'L'état de connaissances sur le paléolithique et le néolithique du Cameroun (prospections de 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971) in C. Tardits (ed.), *Contribution of ethnological research to the history of Cameroon civilisations* (Paris, 1981), vol 1, pp.27-77.

6. N. David, 'Early Bantu expansion in the context of Central African prehistory: 4000-1 BC', in L. Bouquiaux (ed.), *L'expansion bantoue* (Paris, SELAF, 1980), vol 3, pp.618-19.

7. J. Voorhoeve, 'The linguistic unit Mbam-Nkam', *Journal of African Languages*, 10, 2 (1971), pp.1-12.

8. K. Williamson, 'The Benue-Congo Languages and Ijo', *Current Trends in Linguistics*, 7 (1971), pp.245-306.

9. J. Champaud, *Atlas régional Ouest II* (Yaounde, 1973), pp.36-41.

10. C. Tardits, 'Rapport de synthèse. L'implantation des populations dans l'Ouest Cameroun', in Tardits ed., *Contribution*, vol 2 (1981), pp.475-84.

11. L. Hyman, J. Voorhoeve and L. Bouquiaux (eds.), *L'expansion bantoue* (Paris, 1980), 3 vols.

12. J-M. Hombert, 'Grassfields Lexicostatistics', mimeographed report, 1979.

13. K. Stallcup, 'La géographie linguistique des Grassfields', in Hyman and Voorhoeve (eds.), *L'expansion bantoue* (Paris, 1980) vol 1, pp.43-58.

14. J.-P. Warnier, 'Les précurseurs de l'école Berlitz: le multilinguisme dans les grassfields du Cameroun au 1^{er} siècle', in Bouquiaux (ed.) *L'expansion bantoue*, v. 2, pp.827-44.

15. J.-P. Warnier, 'Noun-classes, lexical stocks, multilingualism: the history

of the Cameroon Grassfields', *Language in Society*, 8 (1979), pp.409-23.

16. J. Carnochan, 'Lexicostatistics and African languages', in C Renfrew (ed.), *The Explanation of Culture Change* (London, 1973), pp.643-6.

17. David, 'Early Bantu expansion...' p.609.

18. J.H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa* (The Hague, 1966).

18.K. Grzymiski, 'The greatest-diversity concept and African his Current *Anthropology*, 22, 4 (1981), pp.506-7.

20. J.-P. Warnier, *Pre-colonial Mankon: the development of a Cam chiefdom in its regional setting*, Ph.D. dissertation, University Pennsylvania (1975), University Microfilms International No. 76- and 'Sociologie du Bamenda pre-colonial (Cameroun)', These de do d'état, univ. de Paris X (1983).

21. Tardits, 'Rapport de synthese', (1981).

22. S. Morin, 'Rapport de Mission dans les Grassfields et en pay bamileke' (Yaounde, 1982), mimeo.

23. P. de Maret, 'Preliminary report on 1980 fieldwork in the Grassfields and Yaounde, Cameroun', *Nyame Akuma*, 17 (1980), pp.1

24. P. de Maret, 'New survey of archaeological research and date west-Central and North-Central Africa', *J. African History* 23, 1 (1982), pp.1-15.

25. Maret, 'New Survey...', p.2.

26. P. Hawkins and M. Brunt, *Soils and Ecology of west Cameroon* Rome, 1965), vol 1, pp.205-6.

27. R. Letouzey, *Etude phytogeographique du Cameroun* (Paris, 19E pp.265-74, 281-94, 336-40.

28. J.-L. Dongmo, *Le dynamisme bamileke (Cameroun)*. (Yaounde, 19 vol 1, pp.36-8.

29. T. Shaw, 'Early crops in Africa: a review of the evidence', Harlan et

al. (eds.) *origins of African Plant Domestication* (The Hague, \1976), p.13!

30. Maret, 'New Survey. ', p.2.

31. K. Williamson, 'Some food plant names in the Niger Delta', *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 36 (1970), pp.15E

32. Shaw, 'Early crops...', p.138.

33. C. Tardits: 'Le royaume bamoum: chronologie-implantation des populations--commerce et economie--diffusion du mals et du manioc' in Tardits (ed.), *Contribution...* vol II, p.410.

34. J.C. Caldwell, 'Comments on Manning: "The enslavement of Africans, a demographic model"', *Canadian Review of African Studies*, 16, 1 (1982), p.127.

35.E. Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth* (London, 1965).

36. M. Moisel, *Karte von Kamerun* (Berlin, 1913). After this article was accepted by the editors I received three dates referring to the Fundong sites, as follows: (1) inhabited site, with pottery, fragments of slag and tuyares, associated with 18 polished axes: Ly-3065, 1'390 + or - 230 NP. After dendrochronological correction: 245 to 915 AD. (2) Smelting site No.2 (slag heap): Ly - 3066, 430 + or - 140 BP (after correction 1305 to 1669 AD). (3) Smelting site NO.3 (slag heap): Ly - 3067, 1070 + or - 240 BP (after correction 610 to 1260 AD). The second date, later than the others, seems to be acceptable in view of the fact that this iron-working industry survived with the same techniques and in the same area, up to the middle of the twentieth century.

37. S.W. Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana* (Graz, 1963 [1854]);, pp.11-13 and 20 - 21.

38. Warnier, 'Sociologie du Bamenda pre-colonial'.

39. N. David, 'The archaeological background of Cameroonian history', in Tardits (ed.) '*Contribution ...*', vol 1, p.84.

40. J.-P. Warnier and I. Fowler, 'A nineteenth-century Ruhr in Central

Africa', *Africa*, 49, 4 (1979), pp.329-51.

41. C.L. Goucher, 'Iron is iron 'till it is rust: trade and ecology in the decline of west African iron-smelting', *J. African History*, 22, 2 (1981), pp.179-89.

42. E.M. Chilver, 'Chronological synthesis: the western region, comprising the Western Grassfields, Bamum, the Bamileke chiefdoms and the Central Mbam', in Tardits, *Contribution ...*, vol 2, pp.453-73.

43. E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda* (Buea, 1968), pp.15-18, 132-4.

44. R. Fardon, *The Chamba: a comparative history of tribal politics*, Ph.D. thesis, London (1981).

45. Champaud, *Atlas ...*, p.55.

46. Tardits, 'Rapport de synthase ...'

Traditional Diplomacy, Trade and Warfare in the Nineteenth-Century Western Grassfields¹

PAUL NCHOJI NKWI

Introduction

In 1889 Dr Eugen Zintgraff, the first European to visit the Western Grassfields, was arrested by Kom warriors as he crossed the Kom country. In his book *Nord-Kamerun* (1895), he recounts how his party was suddenly surrounded by warriors who were only pacified with difficulty. 'The ruler (*foyn*) was piqued that Zintgraff had not asked permission to enter and wanted to see him... he was given a spear as passport through the land... To show hospitality the ruler sent an embassy from Kom to bring two goats and some palm wine' (Chilver, 1966:19). This and other incidents proved to Zintgraff that recognised *boundaries* existed among pre-colonial mini-states. It was again evident to him that such boundaries were respected and governed by specific rules and regulations. Boundaries were determined by rivers hills, valleys or unoccupied zones of bush. The movement of peoples across them was regulated by conventions, alliances and specific pact between the different mini-states. This study attempts not only to demonstrate that chiefdoms in this region were not independent isolates but that inter-societal exchange of peoples, things, paraphernalia and symbols of power, was part of diplomatic activity. It is not just a departure from the older monographic anthropological tradition but an effort to review and analyse ethnographic data on a more comparative and regional basis. In the past decades ethnographic studies have been produced on the different chiefdoms in the region, but there has been less effort to look at these chiefdoms as linked each other as yet.²

The Western Grassfields which run from the Upper Cross River basin the middle of the Katsina Ala River and the Gayama gap,' are separate from the Bamum and some Bamileke chiefdoms to the east and south-east by the Nun marshes. With a high altitudinal ecotype and with montane forest galleries along streams and fertile mountain sides, the chiefdoms that have emerged in recent centuries developed, in the course of their history,

commercial and diplomatic ties and exploited the natural environment (Rowlands, 1979:6; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:38ff). The interdependency of precolonial societies has been handled in a number of works on Africa by different scholars. without going into the theoretical perspectives of these works, I do wish to show that the Western Grassfields experience was different. The pluralism or the peer polity situation of the Grassfields made the area unusual. The presence of a number of small- and medium-sized polities within a small area led to the development of a network of diplomatic relations and economic exchanges which differ from those the great Sudanic states with their official diplomats.

Most of the chiefdoms nowadays claim a 'Tikar' origin (Kom, Nso', Bafut, Bamessi, Ngkwen, Ntem, Bum, Babungo, Babanki, Bamessing, etc.). This claim merely asserts that their royal dynasties came from the present Tikar or Ndobu country, an area found near the Upper Mbam and Mape Rivers. A common feature of 'Tikar' traditions is that they concern the fortunes of the chiefly dynasties derived from common ancestors, and lineages related to the ruling lineage (Jeffreys, 1964; Price, 1979). These traditions became the social charters of the different groups. These 'Tikar' groups, which markedly differ in language from the Tikar proper, tend to have developed similar political and social institutions, with slight variations among the matrilineal groups. A second group of chiefdoms sometimes looks to Widekum or to a place called Ntarekon, found three kilometres south of Batibo. These chiefdoms, which include those of the Moghamo- and Menemo-speaking peoples are said to have climbed the Widekum escarpment and settled to the southeast of the Western Grassfields (Warnier, 1975): here again the evidence of language and tradition are at odds in some cases, as in Mankon. A third group are the Bali-Chamba, a mixed group whose original Chamba-Leko nucleus appears to have come from the Upper Benue area. Better organised militarily, these bands entered the Grassfields around the beginning of the nineteenth century, conquering and absorbing other groups on their way south. They were eventually defeated near Dschang in the Bamileke region, and they broke up into six groups, five of which took up residence in the Western Grassfields: they have adopted Grassfields institutions to a greater or lesser extent. A fourth group, insufficiently described and of different linguistic stocks, tends to claim northerly origins. These include the Aghem who claim connexions with the Tiv of Nigeria (but speak a language akin to Bum and Kom) and groups of the Nkambe plateau who claim to have crossed the Donga River and settled in the northern part of the Western Grassfields. A fifth group is composed of those who do not make any reference to a place of origin outside the

Western Grassfields. Most of these are found within larger units, but their lineages have continued to preserve and recount their traditions. Some dynastic lineages have only recently adopted a 'Tikar' identity, or emerged in response to German demands. Many of the traditional social charters seem to represent stages in a process of eclectic ethnogenesis (Kopytoff, 1981; Engard, 1988). The bulk of the Western Grassfields population speaks genetically-related languages, while recent research has suggested that the region has been inhabited for millennia rather than centuries.

Present-day chiefdoms and some more republican polities were already well established in their present sites by the end of the nineteenth century. Their histories reveal small-scale population movements, the readjustment of cultural patterns and adaptations to social ecology. Inter-marriages, trading activities and the establishment of conventions and alliances proved that continuous exchanges were the hallmark of traditional diplomacy. Although the chiefdoms present puzzling diversities in descent reckoning, marriage regulations, inheritance and succession, they all manifest common political features and slight variants in economic activities. Most of the chiefdoms have more or less centralised political systems with coercive and judicial institutions (*ndong*, *okam*, *atsong*, *ngwerong*, *ngumba*, *kwifoyn*, or *kwi'fo*) which give greater expression to the secular authority of the chiefs. Consent and consensus play an essential role in the settlement of disputes in a few smaller chiefdoms and village republics (Chilver, 1965:9; Dillon, 1973,1 Masquelier, 1978; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982) and in some authority is divided and public order is maintained by cult groups, as in Mfumte(Baeke, 1985).

In each so-called 'Tikar' or 'Tikarised' polity the chief was t central figure, the incarnation and embodiment of traditions ant custodian of customs and mores. His palace was ·staffed by wives retainers, pages and ritual specialists. This large retinue of handled the palace economy and performed common services. The (secular authority was exercised through the regulatory society; of the chief's personal intervention, there was no appeal against decisions (Chilver and Kaberry, 1968: 143). The regulatory society normally enjoyed constitutional independence which permitted it discipline the ruler and isolate him from his people and other friendly chiefs if the ruler flagrantly disregarded the mores and traditions of the group. The members of the regulatory society, means a simple institution (Kaberry, 1962), were recruited and constituted in various ways throughout the country and functional royal household economists, envoys and emissaries, specialists (rituals, wine-tapping), announcers of regulations, and guardians of traditions. In the larger chiefdoms they negotiated royal marriage, pacts or alliances and were largely responsible for keeping dip relations solvent. Inter-chiefdom relations were

part of the nineteenth-century life in the western Grassfields. This study will deal, in the main, with the more centralised, palace-centred, politics.

The Dynamics of the Nineteenth-Century Western Grassfields

Chiefdoms that had comfortably established themselves by the middle of the nineteenth century created spheres of influence and line competition. The rich environment also presented objects of competition and mutual cooperation. The exchange of women, gift visits, and the establishment of alliances, constituted diploma patterns which helped to ease conflict and dissipate warfare situations that would have allowed ambitious states to realise expansionist policies. The formation of confederacies by smaller groups was a measure adopted to ward off stronger and better organised aggressive groups. Let us take Ngkwen as an example. Though temporarily dispersed by the re-entry of the Bali-Nyonga in the Ngkwen returned to its site before Bali-Nyonga moved away to occupy the small Bali-Konntan (Peli) chiefdom to the southwest. It entered into a close alliance with Bali-Nyonga which was still active in 1889 (Hutter, 1902:339). Ngkwen formed a confederacy with Mendankwe others in order to deter potentially hostile groups such as Bafut and Mankon. Ngkwen could not rely solely on its pacts with its neighbours but dug trenches around its settlement to keep off raiding and harassing parties. Ngkwen also tried to win over some of these groups by establishing treaties. Ngkwen had provided sanctuary refugees from Mankon. Mankon retaliated by attacking Ngkwen traders crossing its territory to the southern markets. By burying two dogs³ and planting two fig trees on the graves, the two chiefdoms eased off tensions and agreed to mutually defend and protect each other's trade and traders.

A triangular competition also developed between Bali-Nyonga, Mankon and Bafut. Before 1889 Bali-Nyonga had made a peace treaty with Bafut. It was the intention of Bali-Nyonga to isolate Mankon. Knowing that this treaty had dangerous implications, Mankon proposed an alliance to Bafut, thus presenting an alternative. The murder of two native members of Zintgraff's embassy by Bafut at the instigation of Mankon showed how successfully Mankon's diplomacy had paid off. Again, when Bali-Nyonga troops led by German officers attacked Mankon in 1891, not only did Bafut join Mankon in resisting them, but the Bali-Nyonga satellite village chiefdoms also turned against Bali (Chilver, 1966:26; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:113).

The need for manpower to run the household economy of notables and chiefs was crucial at this time. Farm-work, trading, hunting and domestic chores required healthy young men and women. Chiefdoms competed

among themselves by actively attracting refugees from other competing groups. The more powerful chiefdoms offered sanctuary to smaller groups and eventually incorporated them into their polities. Kidnapping raids on smaller and weaker groups brought in women and young men who were recycled into the economic system. Wives obtained through treaties or marriage alliances were usually protected by treaties which guaranteed their safe return if they escaped. However, the quarrel between Mankon and Bafut over 30 women whom Mankon had sent to Bafut for safe-keeping demonstrates again that labour once acquired was preserved at all costs. Despite their mutual defence pact, Bafut still refused to send back the women who had been sent off to Bafut before the Mankon-Bali war (Chilver, 1966:29).

Trading activities also constituted focal points of competition. Chiefdoms in strategic positions on the major trade routes controlled the inflow of trade. Such chiefdoms included Kom, Bum, Bali-Nyonga, Ngkwen, Bambui and Bambili. Scarce commodities such as salt, cloth, beads and guns which entered the Western Grassfields by different trade routes were usually handled by middlemen in these strategic chiefdoms. Trade treaties bound the most favoured chiefdoms together against those that were far removed from the marketing routes. Mankon established a treaty with Bali-Nyonga in order to protect its traders from frequent attacks and the trade treaty also gave it a greater control of trading activities on its own territory (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:104). What we find in the Western Grassfields is that contiguous chiefdoms were often intermittently hostile to one another and developed more cooperative terms with less contiguous chiefdoms that provided them with locally scarce products. Chiefdoms in the same ecological niche, tended to be hostile to each other and developed friendly relations with chiefdoms outside it. For example, chiefdoms near the palm oil producing areas, which they tried to tribute or control, had good relations with those at a greater distance from them.

A chiefdom that could establish its hegemony over neighbouring groups went on to create and consolidate its relations with chiefdoms further removed from its borders. Per *contra*, the formation of a confederacy was a mechanism by which smaller groups could resist the hegemony of a powerful chiefdom and maintain their individual autonomy. Alliances among weaker groups sought to deter would-be aggressors, and the ritual performances involved in such blood treaties gave these treaties some ideological basis that committed contracting groups to mutually defend their interests.

Alliances or treaties were regarded as sacred and were usually endorsed with the blood of slaves, goats, elephants, sheep and dogs. According to data

I gathered at Ngkwén, it was the sacrifice of a slave in pre-colonial times, and later the slaying of goats, dogs, sheep that gave an alliance its importance and sacredness. A series of such treaties have been recorded in the western Grassfields. These 19th-century treaties, which included the Bali-Kumbad/Bamum, Bali-Kumbad/Bafut, Nso'/Baba', Nso'/Bum, Nso'/Ntem, Mankon/Ngkwén, Bali-Nyonga/Ngkwén, Bali-Nyonga/Bamessong and Kom/Ajung, guarantee not only non-aggression and sometimes support in war, but also the return of runaway wives and slaves.

One of the areas in which the chiefdoms exploited their natural environment was the Ndop Plain. The chiefdoms on the plains produce various products (raffia-bags, clay pots, iron goods) and exchange these with chiefdoms outside the region. Most of the chiefdoms have relatively small active populations and were frequently molested by more powerful units who not only tried to disrupt the continuous growth of the different industries but also sought to control the peoples and their natural environment. Despite Bamum slave-raids and the predatory activities of Bali-Kumbad, the Ndop Plain chiefdoms preserved their position in the relay trade with the powerful and friendly chiefdoms of Kom and Nso', who had an interest in presenting them. This was especially the case with Babungo, an important supplier of iron goods and importer of slaves to man its industry. Bamum forced Bafanji and Bangola to move to more defensive positions. Bamum raided Bamali three times for captives. Bali-Kumbad, the most powerful of the chiefdoms on the plain, entered into an alliance with Bamum in order to increase its fortunes. When Bamum had a palace revolt which nearly upset the power structure, the Bamum king turned to its ally, Bali-Kumbad, and received assistance in military equipment. It consisted of a large contingent equipped with flint-lock guns whose assistance helped to quell the revolt. Bamum also turned to a northern ally, Banyo, and to its southern ally, Bagham, for assistance. Instead of establishing trade treaties with these chiefdoms on the plain, Bali-Kumbad, taking advantage of a severe Fulani raid, reduced some of them to a tributary position and received tribute in ironware, dried fish, grain and livestock (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:118ff).

It must be said, however, that the chiefdoms of the western Grassfields did not live in a state of anarchy as implied by the colonial assertion that the establishment of the '*pax Germanica*' necessary to stop local warfare. Nor can the relationship among the chiefdoms be described as peaceful. The relations could be categorised as both peaceful and hostile. The peace-time relations included all diplomatic exchanges (royal women, visits, gifts) and trading activities while hostile relations included sporadic raids, skirmishes, and

formalised warfare. We shall examine these patterns of relations and show how one category did not necessarily exclude the other.

Peace-Time Relations

It was the choice or the decision of one chiefdom to have or not to have diplomatic ties with another chiefdom. Ties among chiefdoms sought to promote harmony and guarantee mutual protection of each other's interests whether such interests were religious, political, economic or social. The building of ties was usually based on kinship, real or fictive, historical connexions or ideology. Chiefdoms that had closer kinship ties justified by the dogma of descent tended to maintain greater ties among themselves and avoided bloody conflicts. Those that had been reduced to a tributary position maintained good relations with the paramount chiefdom by making frequent visits and gifts in order to avoid retaliatory measures on the part of the paramount chiefdom. However, each chiefdom had a procedure for dealing with alien limitrophe states that stood in positions of political and demographic importance. Such procedures included the mutual exchange of women and gifts, the establishment of alliances and the promotion of trade. Chiefdoms maintained control over trade but such control was greater in larger chiefdoms.

The Exchange of Women

Exchange appears to have been a common phenomenon in the nineteenth-century Western Grassfields, and has survived till today. Data gathered in the area show that there was a high frequency in the circulation of women among both royals and commoners. For example, in 1975 Warnier collected 74 genealogies from eight village chiefdoms on the Bamenda Plateau. These genealogies produced a total of 622 women, among whom 188 were married into a chiefdom other than their own (1975:395). In 1978/80 I visited four chiefdoms (Kom, Bafut, Babungo, Bambili) and recorded a total of about 150 royal wives. Twenty-two of these came from chiefdoms other than their own. The Babungo chief alone had 14 royal wives taken from eight chiefdoms (Nso', Kom, Bum, Bangola, Bamessing, Big Babanki, Babanki Tunggo and Mbesinaku). In the vast Bamileke chiefdom of Bangwa, Latour Dejean found that men of high social status (chiefs and notables) tended to marry more wives from outside their ethnic group. The percentage of foreign wives increased as the number of wives increased in the household (1975). The Bamum king took wives from neighbouring

groups and he is reported to have, taken women from Nso' and from the Nsob village chiefdom of the Nkambe plateau (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982: 140). A prince of Mbu village chiefdom, whose mother was a daughter of the chief of Ngyembu, alleged in 1972 that his grandfather had foreign wives that came from Mankon, Meta' and Ngyembu. In 1917 the chief of Akum had foreign wives whose chiefdoms of origin were Ngkwen, Pinyin, Awing and Meta'. The chief of Mankon also took wives from Meta', Njong, Bafut, Ngkwen, Bali, Nso] and Mbutu (Warnier, 1975:395). Bali exchanged royal females only w, the powerful chiefdoms and obtained women from smaller chiefdoms (Hunt, 1925:18). Probably in exchange for freedom from interference the ruler of Kom also exchanged royal women with Nso' and Bali-Nyong and received women from his ten tributary chiefs. In 1980 I still found some royal wives in Kom that had been given to the ruler by rulers of Nso' and Funggom in the early forties. These examples abound.

The exchange of royal women by chiefs was clearly a diplomatic ac and served a number of purposes. Firstly, daughters of chiefs give marriage to other chiefs acted on behalf of their fathers as intermediaries or resident accredited envoys. As these lived in the palace and had greater access to the chief, they were the true spokesmen of their ethnic groups. Their sons could act in the same capacity. But in some chiefdoms where foreign wives were suspected being part of the intelligence network of their respective chiefdom they were not allowed to cook for the chief nor could their sons succeed to any important offices. An Awing princess who married the chief of Bali-Kumbad is said to have stolen her husband's war magi and exposed the secret of Bali-Kumbad's military power and success (Warnier, 1975:396). A legend has it that a princess given to Nkar the Nso' to be trained as a chief's wife ran away from harsh discipline and revealed the way across its defensive ditch to her people, so helping them to establish themselves further south. Secondly, chiefdoms whose dynasties were kinship-related exchanged royal women not only to reinforce their real or fictive connexions also to strengthen and promote cooperation among themselves. These are the sort of diplomatic ties that existed between some 'Tikar' group (Nso', Oku, and Mbiame) and between some Chamba groups (Bali-Nyong Bali-Kumbad, Bali-Gham). Thirdly, the principle of reciprocity obliged even powerful chiefs to make mutual affinal gestures toward their tributary chiefs who gave royal women as part of the tributary act. These tributary chiefs maximised this exchange to their own diplomatic advantage especially when such gestures could fend off future attack and punitive measures. Fourthly, confederate chiefdoms exchanged as a reaffirmation of their common commitment and will to defend common interests.

Palace Bags

Chiefs also cemented links by the exchange of 'palace bags', known in Kom as *bo nto*, in Nso' as *kibam ke Ion*, in Bafut as *aba'nto*, in Bamunka as *ku'nka*, in Oku as *kibam ntok*. The essential pattern reflected reciprocity. The term 'palace bag', or the royal bag, was collectively applied to all the gifts a chief sent to his fellow chiefs. These gifts were usually scarce commodities sent to enhance relations and create more favourable conditions for dialogue. These included honey, elephant tusks, dwarf cattle, leopard pelts, camwood clay and brass pipes, stools, gowns, ornamented calabashes, slaves iron products. Chiefs of equal status and power exchanged elephant tusks and leopard pelts in order to strengthen their relations and promote cooperation while tributary chiefs sent the same objects to the paramount chiefs as a sign of submission and subordination. In any case the principle of reciprocity was always maintained whether the relations were horizontal or vertical, but never in commensurate dimensions in the case of tributary chiefs.

Since such exchanges had diplomatic implications, these took place on specific occasions. Chiefs exchanged gifts on the occasion of boundary settlement, the return of runaway captives and wives, and also when regular trade was opened between two chiefdoms. The tale is told that the Fon of Bum found a Nso' retainer being sold to foreign traders, rescued and clothed him in a fine gown and returned him with the message: "You have kola, we have cloth", an action which established peaceful trade between Bum and Nso'. The announcement of deaths, the enstoolment of new chiefs and marriage negotiations also led to the mutual exchange of gifts (Chilver, 1961:214). The import and export of society paraphernalia, medicine, dances and military insignia could also provide occasions for such exchanges. When Bangola adopted the ceremonial aspect of the Babungo *tifoa* dance, they sent to the chief of Babungo not only a series of gifts but also five marriageable girls (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:87).

Gifts were usually sealed in special royal bags on which was placed a peace emblem, cowries or a plant (*Dracaena sp.*) known in Kom as *nking*, in Mankon as *nkeng*, in Nso' as *kikeng*. The emblem protected the emissaries carrying them from being molested. Sometimes the bearers were led by a man with a bunch of spears whose pointed heads were made of copper. This protection could be reinforced by guards or scouts, thus giving us the impression that diplomatic exchanges were sometimes conducted in an atmosphere of suspicion, reticence and mutual distrust. Whatever the symbols or insignia, they were representative of the power, state and status of

the relations between the giver and the receiver. Chiefdoms that inspired enough fear or were mobilising kinship ties gave further protection to the envoys or emissaries (Warnier, 1975:397).

Envoys, Succession and Mortuary Rites

The envoys who carried out these diplomatic duties were usually princes, notables and palace retainers. Since there was no lingua franca, the various experts had to be versed in the language and culture of the groups they were directly involved in: a considerable degree of multilingualism appears to have been a feature of the region. If a chief made a visit to a friendly chief, he was usually accompanied by these specialists whose knowledge of the given chiefdom helped interpret the required behaviour and diplomatic etiquette. Every chiefdom had a specialist in the affairs of a given friendly chiefdom. Such specialists usually provided initial hospitality to visiting envoys, and prepared them for official audience with the chief. In Bali-Nyonga envoys were often princes because the ruler used diplomacy and warfare to divert the attention of ambitious and energetic princes. Some of them were the ruler's direct representatives in conquered villages and some were entrusted with diplomatic and trade functions (Russel, 1980:40).

Close ties between chiefdoms sometimes provided a peaceful transition in the occasion of the death of a friendly chief: sometimes a dying chief would call in two or three chiefs and confide to them the name of his successor. These friendly chiefs would come in before the chi died. After his death they would arrange the burial, supervise the mortuary rites, then help to enstool the successor. This was alleged to avoid and settle succession disputes among potential heirs to the stool. The chiefdoms of Bum and Mbot, and the chiefdoms of Ndu and Rom, had diplomatic ties and specifications which sought to ensure peaceful transition whenever a chief died (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:163). Throughout the western Grassfields the performance of the mortuary rites of deceased chiefs by their friendly neighbours was not only a diplomatic act but was also a deep ideological gesture with metaphysical implications. Chiefdoms that had established relations among themselves enjoyed a partnership that was equal to blood brotherhood. The nature of such ties called for the performance of blood rituals on the death of a chief, because failure to do so was believed to bring supernatural danger or misfortune on the chiefdom that had failed to act. The diplomatic practices required the full mobilisation of all palace associations such as prince fraternities (*nggiri*, *abil*, *nwoji*, *mandeli*), regulatory societies (*kwifoyn*, *ngwerong*, *kwifo*, and *nggumba*) and military clubs (*manjong*) to

pay due ritual respect to the deceased chief. This full mobilisation of pale fraternities was only required for chiefdoms that had very cordial e strong diplomatic relations. When the relationship did not have very deep political implications, only the military clubs were sent to mourn for the chiefdom, and this would be done along with a blood sacrifice. No chiefdom could come to a royal funeral unless it was officially invited or informed, no matter the degree of relationship. Data gathered in Nso' confirm that the performance of mortuary rites was a major diplomatic act.

During a usurpation the Bamum pretender Ngguwuo had made war on Nso' and intermittent fighting continued along the borderlands between them. In the reign of the legitimate successor, Nsa'nggu, Nso' was again invaded in strength, and Nsa'nggu's head was taken in the he a' of battle, c.1887. Folk accounts of the "war of Nsa'nggu's head" differ widely (Tardits, 1980:195-8). In a Bamum account given to Tardits the invasion of Nso' was planned as a sort of Samsonic suicide in which the Bamum king sought his own death and that of his compet brothers to ensure a proper filial succession. One Nso' account among many collected by Kaberry attributes the surprising Bamum defeat to the judgment of the earth for the earlier killing of one Nso' envoy sent to recover a runaway wife, and the maiming of another. Much conflicting and excusatory legend has encrusted the stories on both sides: their confusion indicates that the events shocked both parties and that the rift needed to be healed by reciprocal acts of ritual diplomacy. Subsequent to the fratricidal war we have mentioned Nso'-Bamum relations continued to be hostile. In the past, it was said, Sembum I (Fomukong) of Nso' offered a blood sacrifice in Bamu on Mbombue's death and that Taamanjo did the same for the short-lived Gbetnkom of Barnum. Neither Sembum II (d.1907) nor his half-brother Mapiri (d.1910) performed the ritual for the death of Nsa'nggu: meanwhile Bamum auxiliaries took part in the German punitive expedition on Nso' in 1906, after which Nsa'nggu's head was returned (OKB, 1907:258-9). Nor did Bi'fon I (d.1947) make a sacrifice on Njoya's death in exile in 1933. Bamum discreetly sought the intervention of Baba', Bangola, Bambalang, Bamessi and Bali-Kumbad to remind Nso' to offer sacrifices for former Bamum rulers. In April 1958 Sem III, ruler of Nso', sent a ram to be sacrificed for the past rulers of Bamum--now on the steps of the Fumban mosque. In May of that year Bamum envoys arrived in Nso' to offer prayers for Bi'fon I and his unhonoured predecessors (Tardits, 1980; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:132; Kaberry, Fieldnotes 1958). This ritual performance led to the re-establishment of good relations which were carried a step further when Sultan Seidou Njimolu' and Fon Sem III were both recognised, in 1964, as 'sons' who had long ago gone their several ways by

the ruler of Kimi, thereby cementing their fraternal relations. This anecdote will, *inter alia*, have illustrated the part played by the mediation of other chiefdoms in composing old quarrels.

The emerging states of the Western Grassfields developed an agrarian economy in which state formation was largely based on the separation of production for long distance trade from production for local consumption or subsistence. The economy, which was gender oriented, granted women the control of foodcrop production and the exploitation of mensal lands owned by their husbands or male lineage heads. Men acquired prestige items through trade that involved the participation of sons, wives and other male dependents to whom the head of the household or trader met certain reciprocal obligations (Rowlands, 1979:2). The accumulation of wealth for the promotion of social status within the group motivated lineage heads, compound heads and notables to engage in different forms of trade, especially regional trade (Nkwi, 1976:118; Rowlands, 1979).

The Western Grassfields chiefdoms traded above all among themselves: by exchanging different locally produced items. Palm oil, which was produced on the periphery of the Western Grassfields in river valleys and on the edge of the forested escarpment, was brought from the outskirts to the centre of the region where it was scarce and could be exchanged for commodities scarce at the periphery. Oil reached the centre through a network of trade friends. We find that palm oil reached Kom, Nso', Oku, Babanki, Ngkwen, from Meta', the Menchum valley and from the Mbembe-Mfumte area (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:43). In turn the chiefdoms of the centre produced grain and livestock or iron goods, which they exchanged for oil. Evidently the demand for oil in the centre was so high that it is estimated that over 78 tons of oil were needed to meet the needs. The slave villages in the Mamfe-Widekum area were pumping much of their palm oil production into the centre of the Western Grassfields (Rowlands, 1979:7). Although beans and grain could be traded over long distances, most of the food crops were circulated within the immediate neighbourhood. Stimulants (tobacco and kola), livestock and fish also constituted major items within the regional markets and in long distance trade. The more efficient iron smelting and smithing centres that developed in the nineteenth century revitalised the trading network as plentiful hoes, farm knives and cutlasses enhanced production (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:47). The production of craft goods (clay pots, pipes, raffia-bags, stools, masks) was also part of the local trade that chiefs and their notables protected and promoted.

In terms of organisation, regional trade rotated on the different market places that were found in every chiefdom. The bigger chiefdom would have

two or more market places. Usually these market places 1 situated near the different palaces or within easy reach of the members of the regulatory societies. Held once within the usual eight-day week, they were organised in such a way as to permit professional traders to attend different markets in a row. In these regional markets foodcrops and local crafts were exchanged. The markets in a given area would be attended by men and women, but the visiting traders were usually adult males who were involved in the trading network. For example, an Oku man would go to Babungo market and buy fish brought by a Bambalang trader; he would take the fish Nso' and exchange it for tobacco and livestock which he would late sell in Oku (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:52).

Since trade was an important inter-chiefdom affair, chiefs were expected to guarantee fairness and honesty and protect the system profiteers. The nearness of the markets to the palaces permitted the palace retainers to control and police them frequently. Dishonest traders were usually punished and if they escaped without settling their debts, the incident was reported to their chief whose duty was to recover the debt. Drastic action was usually taken against people who might disturb the trading links. In Bum defaulting traders were tried by the regulatory society and fettered in a wooden ankle bled. Those who were chained by the legs were left on one spot until they had pleaded guilty. On repentance, water was poured on the offended a palace retainer or notable who advised him never to cheat. Often persistent debtors were taken and enslaved by the creditor chiefdom (Chilver, 1961:242). The members of the regulatory society controled the prices and trading behaviour, and performed rituals of purification when markets were polluted by suicides and other bloc acts. The recital of the names of the ruler's predecessors was a constitutive part of the rituals, and preceded all announcements in market places.

The trading enterprise involved the dangers of robbery and extortion transportation and manpower shortage. Traders walked long distance bring their goods to the various markets. Local trading journeys could take a trader two or more days' walk from home and sometimes into the crossing of fast running rivers, thus limiting the trading activities to the dry seasons. The transportation of large quantity of palm oil, grain, iron products, thousands of sheep, goats and: required considerable manpower. Human portorage was the sole form transportation and manpower needs encouraged the growth of large households among the traders. A male staff was needed to handle the bulk of transportation by portorage (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:53).

The nature of diversified regional trade kept the trader away from home beyond a two-day walk. If he was specialised in the marketing of some exotic

goods, he might establish trade friendship with six or more traders in different chiefdoms. He would probably have to be fluent in the six languages in order to conduct any meaningful trading transactions. His trading links might generate lasting relations and lead to inter-chiefdom marriages. Trading links which led to affinal ties could be continued over a number of generations. The effect of this was that members of a trading network became important actors in inter-chiefdom diplomacy and trade cooperation.

Long distance trade involved the carriage of local products from regional markets over greater distances, or beyond regional boundaries. Such trade linked the coastal trading centres to the trading network of the Western Grassfields. Markets to the north that sought ivory, kola and slaves were also linked to the Western Grassfields' regional markets. The northern and southern trade routes linked the peripheral inland ports to the major trading centres in the centre. From Bamenda, the Ndop Plain chiefdoms were linked to the Adamawa markets through the Nso' and Ntem markets whose radiation reached Banyo, Koncha and Yola. This route carried a fair volume of the kola trade to the Northern markets. Known also as the Hausa trade route, it served also the Kentu and Gashaka markets, and brought into the Western Grassfields cloth, cattle and salt. It also attracted the kola trade from the Bamileke chiefdoms whose chief centres were Bagham and Bangangte. Bum, the most important inland port, linked Nso', Kom, Ngkwen and Bali to the Wukari, Takum, and Ibi markets in Northern Nigeria. Kola also constituted a major item used for obtaining Jukun loth, salt and guns. The kola trade was also attracted from the Bum centre (Fonfuka) to Wum where traders from Katsina Ala, Lafia and Zaria were in touch (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982). The southern or coastal markets received Western Grassfields products (slaves, ivory) through the Mamfe and Widekum centres or through the Bangangte-Yabassi axis. These routes brought in prestige items which were not only needed in e regional trade but were also necessary for household expansion, the acquisition of privileges and the maintenance of a hierarchical social system (Rowlands, 1979:2).

The chiefs did not participate directly in trading enterprises but they promoted trade by providing aspiring young men and successful traders with enough resources and commercial capital. Some chiefs also had a series of traders who traded for them in turn for some pay or remuneration. What was called royal trade was partly this. In Nso', the ruler gave the royal market bag (*kibam ke way ke fan*) to a trader o had made a name in regional and long distance trade. Upon the trader was conferred the privilege of trading in certain commodities that enjoyed royal monopoly (Chilver, 1961:241). In Bali

all princes expected to be given capital by the Mfon with which to start trading, they did so on behalf of their father. In the nineteenth century chiefs replenished their stores and arsenals by controlling major trading routes and sending people off to distant markets to obtain scarce or prestigious items such as Dane guns, cloth and salt, Mankon trade in slaves was controlled and regulated by particular clans whose heads could award the 'slave rope' to clansmen of importance (Warnier, 1975; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982).

The currency used included brass rods, cowries, beads, convel or real hoes and small iron bars. Among these, brass rods and operated largely as a general purpose currency along with cow: reached the region from the Benue lands in the nineteenth century (Barth, 1857). These different forms of currency (cf. Meillas: 1971; Latham, 1971:599; Douglas, 1967:119) were used in the acquisition of a variety of goods. In 1900 a Dane gun was worth 60 brass rods or a slave on the Bamenda plateau. As a prestige the gun was acquired by virtually every household head. Recent figures show that there were over 3,000 guns in Mankon in the 1970s (1980:90). It was not only a prestige item but was also an adv some kinds of warfare. Captives obtained in raids or expeditions be sold for 5,000 cowries (male captive) and 7,000 cowries (female captive) by the middle of the nineteenth century (Nkwi, forthcoming)

Hostile Relations

Between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century, most ethnic groups of the western Grassfields were established in present sites. Oral accounts narrate the small 'wars' they and how they came to possess their land. Such 'wars' were often displays of strength involving few casualties. The situation changed the arrival of northern raiders. The various Bali-Chamba and asset groups, partly horsed, were already versed in impact raiding surprised and terrified populations not large or organised enough to withstand them. But eventually losing their horses from disease were brought to a halt by the northern Bamileke and most were to settle along with the fragments of peoples they had scooped up along their paths or who had joined them; a second reverse at hands of the Bamum brought one group to the Bamenda plateau t displace their forerunners, the Peli. The Fulani, fully horse their mercenary allies, caused even more displacements of population, disorganisation and famine by their slaving raids. Survivor of these raids have recounted the untold hardships suffered by small defenceless groups. Kom received refugees, among them many of the Bamesing, from one of these raids which scoured the Ndop Plain c.1860-70, and temporarily displaced

many villages. The more chiefdoms also, engaged in raiding smaller and weaker neighbours either to capture people as enslaved labour, in the case of Bamum, or to impose their hegemony over people on their margins, as in of Bafut and Nso' (Chilver, 1967; Chilver and Kaberry, 1968; Warnier, 1982). But such chiefdoms, large enough to resist raids or protected by steep approaches from mounted raiders were also able to offer asylum to refugees.

The situation in the nineteenth century leads us to distinct patterns of conflict in the western Grassfields – skirmishes and warfare. Limited in scope, time and purposes, skirmishes were private banditry where a few profiteering persons attacked and robbed traders and travellers. Such gangs could also attack isolated women on farms. It was usual that women working on their farms were guarded by patrols. Raids and frequent encroachments across borders were more common than warfare. In order to justify the disruption of normal relations, warfare was a more formalised form of conflict.

In the Western Grassfields most groups appeared to have been concerned with justifying warfare involving the whole group. Any conflict that led to the spilling of blood was to be avoided because of the supernatural implications of such an act, especially if it involved friends and kin. The spilling of blood without a just cause was believed to bring a polluting effect on society and to cause misfortune or supernatural danger (Dillon, 1973, 1980: 658). It was necessary for diviners to justify warfare before it could be embarked upon. They were consulted before any war adventure. Fights were permitted between related groups so long as lethal weapons were not used, and these types of conflicts were variously named. In Kom they were known as *su lenghadun*, in Mankon as *delam*, in Bambili as *enumbang*, in Meta' as *echwap*, and in Modele (Ide) as *indem* (Dillon, 1980:658; Warnier, 1979; Masquelier, 1977). Warfare was seen as a violent, often bloody conflict between non-related groups, and ritual purifications were required to remove supernatural danger and misfortune. This was even more necessary when dynastically connected groups were involved.

The causes of warfare were multiple and were often deeply rooted in centres of interest and converging sequences of events (Vadya, 1968:87; Smith, 1976; Mair, 1977:67). In the Western Grassfields, wars, which were rare, were usually fought over questions of succession, control of land and people – symbols of authority and power (Dillon, 1973: 458). Although trade was an important enterprise, it does not seem that access to trade routes and the control of trade centres ever became a motivating element in formal warfare in the Western Grassfields (cf. Smith, 1976:44), though banditry might occur against traders. The occasional attacks on early European traders

were largely in reaction to aggressive behaviour and unruly carrier parties (Rudin, 1968:308).

The penetration of the region by the Germans was not an easy affair toward the end of the nineteenth century. In several places it took the Germans a number of months to bring some of the groups to their 'knees. The description of German punitive expeditions shows strong resistance by a militia organised along medieval lines (DKB, 1902, 1903: 298f, 1905: 557-8, 667-72, 1906: 235-241, and see Nkwi 1989). Prior to the advent of colonisation every village had a military club (*manjong*, *njong*, *nggi-ncua*, *ncobo*). Their size ranged from 20 to 100 men of fighting age. In 1889 Zintgraff reported that there were 1,500 warriors in Bali which only had a population of 6,000. Bali satellite chiefdoms had more than 3,500 warriors (Zintgraff, 1895; Chilver 1966:27). Zintgraff, as we saw, recounts how he was suddenly surrounded by warriors as he entered the Kom country from its northern border (Chilver, 1966:19). The largest militia in the whole of the grassfields was that of Bamum whose over 10,000 fighting men could only be compared with the armies of west African empires and the middle ages in Europe (Tardits, 1977:197; Smith, 1976:63).

The organisation of men into fighting units was fairly uniform in the region. Besides the local units, often organised on the basis of (*badmfon* and *ndanji* in Bali-Nyonga, *ndo-kifengin* Kom) there were armed retainers or palace clubs of picked men (Bridges, 1933:pa.3 Nkwi 1976). Each military club was presided over by a senior warrior who was assisted by younger men. Larger chiefdoms might also resort to men chosen for cunning and dissimulation, who might be, or act as part of, traders to collect information, who spoke several langue and who were practised tricksters and kidnappers: they were used scouts and spies (*ngwe*). They were often credited with mysterious powers: in reality they formed a military intelligence network for their uses in the clandestine slave-trade or the capture of persons for ransom. The local clubs, in peace-time, could be called out for public work, such as repairs to the palace, the construction of hanging bridges or to take part in the dry season royal hunt, the chiefdoms differed in the organisation of the last.

Decisions concerning peace and war were usually taken by a war council over which the chief presided. The duty of this council was to consult the ancestral spirits, perform war rituals and prepare the medicine and magic. Ankermann (1911:8) gives some circumstantial descriptions of war medicine and also describes some polite preliminaries used in Bali-Kumbad for raids. During the Bali-Mankon war, in which four Germans died, Mankon initially sent magicians put magic on the road to weaken warriors of the Bali-German contingent. When Zintgraff heard about this, he immediately "sent boys to

relieve themselves on these magical objects, a measure which filled Garega (Bali chief) with merriment and maintained morale” (Chilver, 1966:26). The performance of war rituals and medicines destined to give spiritual protection to the warriors. Such rituals and sacrifices were offered before and after a war adventure principally to avert any misfortunes or supernatural danger. When council met in Kom to ‘sharpen the spear’ (war), top warriors, priests and diviners explored the advantages and benefits before war could be declared.

The weapons used ranged from natural devices to man-made arms. In the nineteenth century, projectile, shock and defence weapons had been developed. The variety of weapons definitely depicted the level technological achievement and was certainly an index of the people’s art and culture (Smith, 1976:89). The projectile weapons (spears arrows, stones and guns) were those which could cause damage from emitting source. Spears and other iron weapons which were produce the iron industries that had grown up in the nineteenth century, differential impact on the pattern of warfare and increased the casualty toll. The gun, mostly the ordinary flint-lock muzzle type was introduced into the region by mid-nineteenth century. Guns w used in pitched battles with the combined efforts of spearmen (Warnier, 1980:15). The shock weapons (clubs, sticks, daggers) were used for close range fighting and were meant principally to inflict pain and weaken the enemy. The defence weapons included shields, war medicines, trenches and walls. Warriors used the shield to protect themselves from flying volleys of spears. A typical Western Grassfields shield was usually rectangular, 22 inches long and 10 inches broad and slightly curved in the centre. It could be made of buffalo skin or of some light material. Trenches and walls appear to have been set up to defend the settlement. Trenches, traces of which have been found in Babungo, BameSSI, Bambalang, Mankon, Ngkwen, Bambui, Kom and Nkar, usually concealed large parties of warriors along the town perimeter during battles. They also served to keep cattle and wild beasts from crossing into the settlement and kidnappers from escaping with ease (Migeod, 1925:11; Warnier, 1975:419; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982:157). Apart from occasional practices in the different war clubs there was little or no formal training in any group. The annual dances at the palaces were the only occasions during which each military fraternity re-enacted the group’s military history by demonstrating their tactics to the ruler and his court.

Formal declaration of war was a part of military ethics. Prior declaration permitted both sides to parley, and send women, children and the elderly to safety (Smith, 1976:53). The date, time and place were usually pre-arranged by the envoys of both groups. In Kom it was customary to send two bundles, one of ashes, the other of camwood to the enemy chief. If the chief

chose the bundle of ashes, he opted for war and therefore the date and time were arranged. If the enemy chief chose the bundle of camwood it meant that tributary status was a better option. It is reported that the ruler of Kom sent a bundle of ashes to the German commander in 1904 when the officer demanded that labour and food be sent to the military station in Bamenda. The Germans mounted a punitive expedition on Kom which lasted until January 1905 (DKB, 1905). Sometimes rods were used in the declaration of war. In 1889 four chiefs allied to Bafut and Mankon sent four rods to Bali-Nyonga as a sign of war (Chilver, 1966:11). As soon as formal declaration was made, fighting could start at dawn, sometimes at the blast of the royal ivory horn. The warriors were sometimes led into the battle front by scouts or flag bearers (*tutunwan* in Bali-Nyonga): the Bali custom, borrowed from the Hausa or Kanuri, of fighting under a flag was borrowed in turn by e.g. Bafut, Ngkwon and Nso'. When fighting started it could last for several hours before the warriors retired to their respective settlements to resume the following day if there was no clear-cut winner. It could continue for a number of days. During the battle each group tried to inflict as many casualties on the opponents as possible, overpower them, reach the settlement and take women and children captive (Warnier, 1975:413). To prove their "bravery on return to the settlement, warriors were required to bring home heads of fallen enemy warriors and these were usually preserved in the war club. Captain Glauning noted in 1906 that the frontage of the war clubs in the Nso' capital, the *lav se mfu'*, were adorned by 900 heads (DKB, 1906:707). There is no evidence to prove that casualties were usually heavy. Fighting with rudimentary weapons could not have caused many losses on both sides. Apart from the Nso'-Bamum war which is said to have claimed over 1,500 lives (Tardits, 1980:198), no war usually claimed more than a few people in pre-colonial times. A Nso' expedition against the Wimbun which cost Nso' 30 lives was regarded as terribly unfortunate. Conventions, treaties and kinship ties mitigated warfare, and warfare usually' up in more treaties, and created more peaceful conditions for both sides. Generally, warfare was usually the last resort after negotiations had failed to bring two chiefdoms to peaceful and amicable terms.

Conclusion

Modern diplomacy or international relations attempt to promote peaceful co-existence among nations. Cultural exchanges, military expertise and trade are usually components of diplomatic strategy. From western Grassfields ethnography, it is now evident that inter-chiefdom relations handled similar

concerns. The oral tradition of the different groups show population movement and adjustments often produced situations which traditional diplomacy had to deal in its own way. A number of deductions can be made from the data available to us.

Firstly, the contiguous chiefdoms developed friendly cooperative ties. But this did not exclude trade and the exchange of females between trade friends in hostile chiefdoms. Hostility at a high that is, between chiefs, did not prohibit commoners from carrying different forms of exchange (marriage, gifts). We are aware that modern diplomacy if two countries are on bad terms, their citizens not usually allowed to make mutual visits. Alliances, the format confederacies and the exchange of females were the mechanisms of survival for small, vulnerable groups. Secondly, traditional did not provide for real resident representatives. The exchange royal females fulfilled two basic needs. A princess who was married off to another chief became not only a sexual partner and extra to her husband; she and her children became also the intermediate and permanent resident envoys of her father. 'Thirdly, royal fun' were usually performed with high ritual decorum by the chiefdom question and by friendly chiefs who came to tender their condo I No chief could attend a royal funeral or send representatives u he was officially invited. The fact that two chiefdoms were friendly and had treaties did not suffice for any to be present at funeral without an invitation. The religious or metaphysical dimension traditional diplomacy had more ramifications. Fourthly, trade was an activity anyone could engage in as long as he had the resources capital. No chiefdom was excluded from the trading enterprise or network; traders even had trade friends in enemy chiefdoms. The role of chiefs was to promote and make available capital to success1 traders and to await the profit. The policing of the markets was to provide good conditions for traders and to apprehend and punish who disrupted trade. The involvement of traders in the exchange females created lasting trade connexions, and the strengthening of chiefdom's intelligence network.

Finally, although small raids were frequent and largely to the profit of a few individuals, warfare, with its devastating consequences usually a pre-arranged activity whose primary purpose was to settle disputes that could not be otherwise handled. Violent conflicts were usually followed by conventions and treaties that permitted the two chiefdoms to live at peace whether in situations of independence or in a tributary status.

In conclusion it can be said that the western Grassfields was not a place where different peoples lived in isolation. The institutional links between the chiefdoms permitted people to circulate freely, trade and exchange women and gifts. When conflicts arose, treaties or alliances were established and

peaceful co-existence was further promoted

Acknowledgement

I was able to gather the data for this article with financial assistance from the University of Yaounde and from the DGRST. With a Fulbright Fellowship (1983) I was able to spend three months at the University of South Carolina and write it up. I am grateful to Mark DeLancey (University of South Carolina), Kent Maynard (Denison University), and Richard Dillon, for their criticisms and observations.

1. This paper was first published in *Science and Technology Review*, Social Sciences Series, vol. 1, 3-4, 1983, Yaounde, and is reproduced here by kind permission of the author with some trivial changes and additions. A fuller bibliography will be found in the original version, together with three sketch maps. A few new titles have been added.

2. J. P. Warnier's *Echanges, hierarchies et deveoppement dans 1e Bamenda pre-colonial* (Franz Steiner, Stuttgart, 1985), published since this article was originally written, represents this approach.

3. Dogs were used by some chiefdoms in this ritual, and the blood of dogs was the closest symbol to human blood. Probably in later days, dogs replaced humans, whose ghosts were held to activate the powers of the earth against breaches of covenants.

References

- Ankermann, B., 1911. 'Religion der Graslandbewohner Nordwest Kameruns', *Correspondenzblatt der Deutschen Gesellschaft fur Anthropologie*, Berlin.
- Baeke, V., 1985. 'Les objets rituels des societas initiatiques chez les Wuli', *Systemes de pensee en Afrique noire*, Cahier 8.

- Barth, H., 1957. *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central A* Vol. III, Longman, London.
- Bridges, W.M., 1934. Reassessment Report on Bansa District, Bamenda (TS), Buea Archives.
- Chilver, E.M., 1961. 'Nineteenth century Trade in the Bamenda Grassfields' Southern Cameroons, in: *Afrika und Uebersee*, Band XLV/4, 233-258.
- 1965. 'Meta' Village Chiefdoms of the Bome Valle: *Nigerian Field*, 30, 1, 4-18, and 30, 2, 52-9.
- , 1966. *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda, Adamal the Benue lands*, 1889-1892. Buea, Government Press.
- , 1967. 'Paramountcy and Protection in the Cameroon Bali and the Germans 1889-1913' in Gifford and Louis (eds. *Britain and Germany in Africa*, Yale University Press, New 479-511.
- Chilver, E.M. and Kaberry, P.M., 1965. 'The Kingdom of Kom in W Cameroon', in Forde and Kaberry (eds.) *west African kingdo the Nineteenth century*, OUP for IAI, London, 123-51.
- , 1968. *Traditional Bamenda: the precolonial histoethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*, Government Printer Buea.
- Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (main references only), 1905. 'Bericht Hauptmann Glauning, Leiters der Station Bamenda, ueber sei expedition nach Bali, Bameta und dem Suedbezirk', 16, 667- 72
- , 1907. 'Der Kopf des Bamum-Herrschers', 18, 258-9
- Dillon, R., 1973. "Ideology, Process and Change in Pre-colonial Political Organisation." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania.
- , 1980. 'Violent conflict in Meta' society', *American Ethnologist*, Vol.7, No.4, 658-73.
- Douglas, M., 1967. 'Primitive Rationing: A Study in Controlled Exchange', in R. Firth (ed.), *Themes in Economic Anthropology* Tavistock, London, 119-47.

- Engard, R.K., 1988. 'Myth and Political Economy in Bafut', *Paic* 34, 50-90.
- Hunt, W.E., 1925. *An assessment Report on the Bali Clan in the Division of the Cameroon Provinces* (TS), Buea Archives.
- Hutter, F., 1892. 'Zeremonien beim Schliessen von Blutfreundscl den Graslandstaemmen in Kamerun-Hinterland', *Mitt. a.d. deutsches Schutzgebieten*, 176-81.
- , 1902. *Wanderungen und Forschungen im Nord-Hinterland von Kamerun*, Vieweg, Braunschweig.
- Jeffreys, M.D.W., 1946. 'Nsangu's Head', *African Studies*, 1, 71-5.
- , 1952. 'Nsaw History and social Categories', *Africa*, 22, 1, 71-5.
- , 1964. 'Who are the Tikar?', *African Studies*, 23, 2-4, 141-53.
- Kaberry, P.M., 1952. *Women of the Grassfields*, HMSO, London.
- , 1958. Fieldnotes and correspondence, unpublished, BLPES, London School of Economics.
- , 1962. 'Retainers and Royal Households in the Cameroon Grassfields', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 3-1(10), 282-98.
- Kaberry, P.M. and Chilver E.M., 1961. 'An Outline of the Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga, Southern Cameroons', *Africa*, 31, 4, 355-71.
- Kopytoff, I., 1981. 'Aghem Ethnogenesis and the Grassfields Ecumene', in C. Tardits (ed.), *The contribution of Ethnological Research to the History of Cameroon Cultures*, Vol. II, CNRS, Paris, 371-82.
- Latham, A.J.H., 1971. 'Currency, Credit and Capitalism on the Cross River in the Pre-colonial Era', *Journal of African History*, 12, 4, 599-605.
- Mair, L., 1977. *African Kingdoms*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Masquelier, B., 1978. "Structure and process of political Identity:

- Ide, A polity of the Menchum Valley.” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania.
- Meillassoux, C., 1971 (ed.). *The development of indigenous trade and markets in West Africa*, OUP for IAI, London.
- Migeod, F.W.H., 1925. *Through the British Cameroons*, Heath Cranton, London.
- Nkwi, P.N., 1976. *Traditional Government and Social Change*, University Press, Fribourg, Switzerland.
- , 1989. *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields, 1891-1913*, Research Report No.37, African Studies Centre, Leiden.
- Nkwi, P.N. and Warnier, J.-P., 1982. *A History of the Western Grassfields*, Publication of the Department of Sociology, Yaounde.
- Price, D., 1979. “Who are the Tikar now?”, *Paideuma*, 25, 89-98.
- Rowlands, M., 1979. ‘Local and long distance Trade and Incipient Formation on the Bamenda Plateau in the late 19th century’, *Paideuma*, 25, 1-20.
- Rudin, H.R., 1968 (original edition 1938). *Germans in the Cameroons 1884-1914*. Yale university Press, New Haven.
- Russel, S.W., 1980. “Aspects of Development in Rural Cameroon: Political Transition amongst the Bali of Bamenda.” Ph.D. Thesis Boston University.
- Smith, R.S., 1976. *Warfare and Diplomacy in pre-colonial West Africa*, Methuen, London and Norwich.
- Tardits, C., 1980. *Le royaume Bamoum*, Armand Colin, Paris (also in the earlier form of a Paris doctorat d’état thesis, 1977).
- Vadya, A.P., 1968, ‘Hypotheses about the Functions of War’, in F Harris and Murphy (eds.), *War: the Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*, New York.

Warnier, J.P., 1975. "Pre-colonial Mankon: the development of a Cameroon chiefdom in its regional setting." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

-----, 1980. "Trade Guns in the Grassfields of Cameroon" *Paideuma*, 26, 79-92.

Zintgraff, E., 1895. Nord-Kamerun, Paetel, Berlin.

The Oku Iron Industry In Its Regional Setting: A Descriptive Account*

IAN FOWLER

Eugen Zintgraff, the first European to reach the prosperous Ndop Plain chiefdom of Babungo, in 1889, noted that it was a major cell of iron production with a widespread reputation for its products for peaceable dealings with strangers (Zintgraff, 1895). Fifty years later wartime shortages prompted the British colonial administration to investigate iron production in the region. Some details of smelt iron ore in a Babungo furnace were obtained and evidences of a formerly more widespread iron industry collected (Jeffreys, 1942 1942a). In the later 'seventies a survey of smelting debris and foundry remains, together with recorded testimonies from particular informants, was made in Babungo and neighbouring areas. These investigations revealed a pre-colonial industry of hitherto unsuspected proportions (Warnier & Fowler, 1979), up to the pres the largest single centre of iron production recorded in sub-Saharan Africa. These and subsequent researches have also provided evidence for the great age of human occupation and the early onset of the Age in the Western.

In the nineteenth century, high output in Babungo was facilitated by an innovation in furnace structure. This was traditionally assoc with Ntur refugees from the Nso'-Oku borderland displaced by a late eighteenth-century raid, possibly by the Pere and Daka vanguard Ba'ni, long preceding the arrival of Ga Wolbe's Ba'ni and the settlement of Bali-Kumbad. This innovation enhanced capacity and economies of scale along with a changed fuel usage¹ which permit' the intensification of production by a sedentary industry set within grasslands environment. Elsewhere in most of the region

* Editors' note. This paper largely reproduces, with Dr Fe kind permission, a chapter from his London University doctoral 1 1989, with a prologue drawn from his prefatory material. The 01 thesis, which contains photographs, maps and plans of sites, statistical and technical appendices and an extensive bibliography can be consulted in the Senate House Library, University of Lone and this paper are the author's copyright. Grassfields (de Mare 1980, 1982; Warnier and Asombang, 1982; Warnier, 1985, 1986).

separate smelting and smithing, using the older, smaller types of furnace as the 'Bakwang' type) and exploiting traditional fuels and ore collapsed. In its place arose a less segmented and less capital intensive technology centring on the recycling of the slag left older industry in simple open hearth furnaces.³ Oku provides an example of this simplification.

The enormous output of the Babungo industry was linked to a mode of labour recruitment and distribution of rewards that overrode the boundaries of the kin-group. It involved the import of young male slaves who were assimilated into the labour base for iron production, and also the import of female slaves who ensured food production, demographic increase and the concentration of bridewealth rights over their issue in the hands of the masters of foundries and smithies. Moreover, non-kin were encouraged to offer their labour freely in the establishment and operation of a foundry or smithy in return for access to it. The inauguration of a new foundry or smithy, a very substantial expense for the new owner, requiring ritual medications, was celebrated with gifts to fellow-masters and the festal participation of helpers and important neighbours. A pervading ethos of Cooperation and stress on the sharing of the product in terms of a familial paradigm provided for the social validation of the accumulation of wealth by individual descent-group heads.

The distribution of the Babungo industry's products was characterized by periodic markets, organized trading groups, the use of convertible currencies – brass rings, beads and, principally, cowries – by credit and by the commissioning of iron goods. The heavy costs of transporting ironware to regional markets was largely taken over by specialist trading chiefdoms that clustered for refuge round Babungo in the northern Ndop Plain in the course of the nineteenth century. Some were displaced early on by Bamum and Bali-Kumbad attacks, others by a late and damaging Banyo Fulani raid; most eventually returned to older sites after the defeat of Bamum by Nso', C.1886, or even later, as we know from German sources (e.g. Hartler, 1903; Vollbehr, 1912; Adametz, 1913). Meanwhile, unencumbered by transportation costs, output rose to even higher levels. The material wealth generated by Babungo iron production was further enhanced by the profitable conveyances between the continental and coastal spheres of trading activity that abutted on the Grassfields.

A comparison between the Babungo and other industries throws light on the seemingly convergent phenomena of, on one hand, the regional cessation of large-scale production in favour of a condensed recycling industry and, on the other, innovation based on a more advanced type of furnace at the centre of the region. In order to understand the comparative advantages Babungo

derived from its organization and technology we shall briefly examine iron working in its close neighbour, Oku.

The Oku Iron Industry

Introduction

Data on the Oku (properly Ēbkwo) industry were obtained through interviews with elderly informants involved in iron production in the early part of the century, from the Observation of derelict workshops, bras scatters and 'ore' sources, and also from unpublished colonial accounts⁴ and work done by Jeffreys.⁵

Oku was a major centre of production at the end of the nineteenth century employing open bowl furnaces to recycle slag. Informants in nearby chiefdoms ranked its importance as second only to Babungo. The production was probably its major source of wealth with the bulk of its products traded to Nso' in exchange for goods such as cloth, salt and tobacco. While the main direction for the distribution of Oku ironware was undoubtedly northwards via Nso', Oku was by no means isolated from the highly profitable trade that centred on the exchange of Bamum slaves for ironware in and around the Ndop Plain.⁶ A master iron worker, the *bakelam*, enjoyed high social esteem second only to the *Fon* and senior elders. The *Fon*, himself, was a *bakelam* and when died he was buried with a used Oku hoe.

There was no absolute division of labour between smithing and smelting in Oku to parallel the organization of the industry in Babungo. All work was done in one place, the *kelam*, using a single open bowl hearth albeit with one specialist smith finishing off the final forging of ironware. In the immediate precolonial period Oku iron workers smelted only old slag and did not use true iron ore. The reduction of this slag was done in the same hearth that was used shingling the bloom and also forging the ironware. Oku iron workers were not localised but scattered throughout the chiefdom and, Babungo, both commoners and princes participated in all elements iron production. Oku iron workers were not excluded from the upper echelons of the regulatory association, *kwi'fon*, which appears to have played no controlling role vis-a-vis iron workers or iron production. There was no association of *bakelam*, who only met as a group when a new workshop was constructed.

The *Fon* of Oku was said to control iron working in so far as his permission was required to establish a new workshop. A prospective *bakelam* had to take two calabashes of wine to the *Fon* and formally request his permission and then the first two hoes to be made were sent to the palace.

No other payment or gift was required. However, the *Fon* might command work on his behalf at any time by sending a young palace retainer with a calabash of wine and some food to a workshop, with the message that these things should be given to the *bakelam* to entertain the ironworkers. In return, up to three hoes would be sent to the *Fon*. The *Fon* had his own workshop,⁷ operated by palace retainers, which was similar to other *kelam*, save that it had two doors instead of one, one door reserved for the use of the *Fon*. Once or twice a year each ward of the chieftdom was requested to go and prepare charcoal and carry it to the palace. Palace retainers were sent to dig and fetch the old slag to be smelted. The *Fon* gave the ironware produced in his *kelam* to specialist traders to take and sell and return and hand over a sum of cowries representing a fair profit.

Establishing a *kelam*

The Oku workshop was unlike either the Babungo foundry or smithy but very similar to workshops found in Achain, both Big and Small Babanki Mme and 'Bafum'.⁸ It was unpaved, with an unbeaten earth floor, square in plan, and had a lightweight loft platform where tuyeres were stored and dried. Other materials were kept on the floor. It was similar to an ordinary Oku dwelling but smaller, and required less work for construction. Unlike the practice in Babungo no iron anvils were used to forge iron in Oku, only a small stone anvil; also there was no grooved stone anvil for forming blades or spear sockets. Generally, the Oku tool assemblage⁹ appears to reflect its relatively lower engagement in production of a wide range of ironware for external markets.

For the Oku furnace a pit was dug c.3ft deep and 5ft across at the top tapering at the base and lined with basalt stones plastered with mud mixed with wood ash. There were three depressions around the perimeter of the bowl. A deep depression was made to allow the tuyere to be placed directly into the hearth with charcoal piled on top. Facing this was another gap through which an iron spatula could be inserted into the hearth in order to rabble the bloom, rake the charcoal together and unblock the mouth of the tuyere from adhering slag. Between these two gaps was another where the specialist smith, the *wuuletuyin*, might heat up the iron that he was forging on the stone anvil. Informants claimed that once built the hearth never needed repair and even the plaster on the basalt stone lining was not redone.

The final task was to summon junior lineage kin and request neighbours and friends to help in carrying the two large stone anvils for the workshop. For this it was necessary to prepare a great feast of wine, fufu and fowls to

serve to those carrying the stones. A wealthy *bakelam* might kill a goat and roast it in the hearth of the *kelam* but no sacrifice or libation was made to or on the stones. The large central stone anvil, the *nggo-kelam*, was carried, as in Babungo, by means of ropes attached to poles, with knotted leaves of elephant grass attached to drive away 'devils', and with 5-10 people in front and the same number behind bearing the load on their shoulders. A hole would be dug in the floor of the *kelam* in which the stone anvil was placed to keep it firm. This was not the subject of a secret ritual performed by master-smiths as was the case in Babungo. The stone sometimes required to be shaped using extremely hard round stone hammers and it was occasionally heated first to make this task more easy.

Once the central stone anvil and also the smaller forging anvil were in place one was known henceforth as *bakelam*, and the main feast might commence. As in Babungo, the first and largest share of the items of food and drink were offered to the established *bakelam*, all of whom should be present. In effect, they were given special bundles of meat to take home to their wives (some say they actually contained cowries), and wine to fill their own calabashes, and then they would sit and join in with the general feasting.

Before iron production might start it was necessary to gather and prepare 'medicines' for the workshops. Pounded cocoyams, ground *egusi* and a quantity of raffia wine were taken into the workshop and a pre-pubescent girl called inside. A special calabash, used for sharing wine, was taken and placed in the small basket used for measuring slag and then placed on the head of the girl. The party set off into the bush with one man at the head followed by the girl to seek out the 'medicines' for the *kelam*. These were simply samples of all the different leaves that they came across as they walked and the goal was to fill the basket. As each leaf was cut a libation of wine was made and a short prayer uttered to activate the 'medicine':

Oh God, as we are cutting this leaf you are the one cutting it for us,
We will go and prepare it for good fortune for us and all of Oku.

There are interesting parallels between this ritual and that performed in Babungo for the collection of similar medicines buried in a pot beneath the developed Babungo clump furnace. In the Oku ritual, however, when all the leaves had been collected and the remaining wine and food consumed, they were taken back to the workers to be burnt at the base of the hearth at the commencement of the initial smelt. If at any time there arose problems in producing good blooms or hoes were getting cracked, then it was necessary to repeat the ritual of gathering the leaves and burning them in the hearth.

Oku Tool Inventory

The iron, stone and wooden tools of the Oku *kelam* were less numerous and less elaborate than the sets of tools found in either the Babungo foundry or smithy:

Item Description

Iron Tools

mbe-kelam Iron hammer for forging hoes, etc., on the *ibuu* anvil. Two blocks of bloom were smelted for this, while three were required for a hoe *bakelam* invited neighbours and other iron workers to assist in making this tool but there were none of the sacred and mystical elements associated with it as in Babungo. It was stated by informants that the first man who began iron working used a stone tool to prepare his *mbe. kenfia'-mbe* lighter iron hammer used to make a *mbe*, a light work such as finishing edges of a hoe so as not to crack it. *mbang-kelam* An iron shovel or spatula-like tool used for turning bloom in the hearth and unblocking the mouth of the tuyere from slag.

Stone Tools

nggo-kelam central stone anvil for shingling bloom and forming the rough shape of ironware

ibuu-kelam stone anvil for forging the final shape of ironware with the iron hammer.

ncem Small rounded heavy stone hammer, held with two hands and used for rough shaping of iron on the *nggo-kelam*.

ite-kissa Grinding stone for breaking up old slag to be re-smelted.

ite-kissa kene Hammer stone for grinding old slag.

Wooden Tools

kenuk-kelam Carved container for water, no designs

kembaaten Long thin stick thrust down a tuyere to clear it of blockages

mbangupsus: Bellows sticks

Others

keghen Bellows, similar to those in Babungo¹¹

gwashe Skins for bellows

kinyess Maize-cob leaf water sprinkler

keyung 'Connector' (lit.), for joining bellows to tuyere

kele-kissa Measuring basket for old slag
kaakenyeki Basket for pouring charcoal into hearth
mbangsekii Basalt stone lining for hearth
song-kelem Clay tuyeres
keyii 'nten Bloom

Mystical Sanctions

The punitive mystical sanctions associated with theft from a workshop were not linked in Oku with the iron hammer, as in Babungo, but with the leaf 'medicines' burnt in the hearth. At the juncture that these leaves are burnt a curse is cast:

This is a medicine we are burning and if any person takes property from here that does not belong to him then he will go and suffer from an incurable swollen belly, and die.

Accordingly, all tools, material inputs and any other property might safely be left in the workshop. Similarly, the central stone anvil was not the focus of sacrifices and libations and no 'medicines' were buried beneath it as was done in Babungo. In Oku it was the open bowl hearth and leaf medicine burnt in it that provided this focal point.

Organization of Work

Iron working was most intensively done in the rainy season since, according to local informants, in the dry season men were too busy building and repairing houses and also clearing farms in preparation for planting. However, even in the rainy season an Oku workshop would, unlike a Babungo foundry or smithy, not be in use for considerable periods of time when the labour force were out, busy making charcoal or going on expeditions to gather slag.

Other constraints on production centred on mortuary rites and also the *kwi'fon* regulatory association. If an adult or a child died in the ward where the workshop was located they stopped work on the day of the burial. On the second day they went to commiserate with the mourners and on the third day recommenced work. When a *Fon* died work ceased for the duration of the death celebration, a period up to weeks.¹² If a queen or a prince died in another ward work was unaffected. When the regulatory association left the chiefdom to and celebrate the death of another *Fon*, no work might be undertaken until its return.

In contrast to smelting in Babungo there were no sexual prohibit or required sexual continence for Oku iron workers, and any male mature female was free to enter the workshop. Access to the Babungo *smithy* was similarly unrestricted, yet in both chiefdoms and throughout the Grassfields (Koloss, 1977) major ritual activity required male sexual continence and the presence of nubile female believed to render male transformative medicine ineffectual: hence selection of a pre-pubescent girl, perhaps. One is left to wonder whether the permitted entry of adult women to the workshop betook the leading role of smiths over smelters in the development of the Oku recycling industry.

(i) *Kelam* Personnel and Labour Recruitment

The key personnel were the *bakelam* and the *wuuletuyin*, the remaining workers were simply called the *ghelesese-kelam*, i.e. the people pumping the bellows. The *bakelam* was the master of the workshop, the *wuuletuyin* was a specialist smith who worked only on forging finishing ironware on the small forging stone anvil. Other workers were either close lineage kin of the *bakelam* or co-resident in the same ward. In complete contrast to the organization of work in Babungo, non-specialists in Oku contributed both labour and mate inputs in return for ironware. The actual forging of the ironware still restricted to the specialist smith, the *wuuletuyin*, but all other tasks might be done under the direction of the *bakelam* by unskilled labour. It will be shown below that only a small portion the total range of ironware produced in Oku was sold, most items being obtainable through gifts from the *bakelam* rendered in return the provision of labour both in the smelting process and in the arduous tasks associated with the gathering of material inputs.

(ii) *Bakelam*

A *bakelam* had either built and equipped the *kelam* or succeeded lineage headship in which the title was vested. He sent his son: junior lineage kin to work in the *kelam*, and others dwelling in same ward who came to work there would be given equal treatment. Ideally it was thought that a *bakelam* should know all aspects of work and in most cases he would have been a *wuuletuyin* before succeeding to his father's titles or establishing his own *kelam*. He derived wealth from his position in a number of different ways. Non-kin coming to use the *kelam* under his stewardship would dig their own old slag and prepare their own charcoal but in more than enough quantity so that

there was always some left over at the end of the day. This was put aside in one corner of the *kelam* for the use of the *bakelam*. He also received part of the bloom that had been produced. At some point the *wuuletuyin* would come to the *bakelam* and say that there were sufficient materials and ask what he should make for him. A quantity of bloom would be prepared by whoever was working in the *kelam* at the time and *wuuletuyin* would forge the requested ironware and be rewarded by the *bakelam* with a gift of food, wine and, perhaps, a fowl. Generally, sufficient bloom for one hoe would be set aside for the *bakelam* in the course of two sets of people each working up to three days in the smithy, according to the data gathered in the 1970s which closely matches that gathered by Jeffreys in the 1940s when the industry was still extant.

At other times those people in the ward who worked occasionally in the *kelam* would be asked by the *bakelam* to go and collect old slag and prepare charcoal for him. This would be done freely in the knowledge that by so doing access to the *kelam* and its equipment and the skills of the *wuuletuyin* would be obtained and, also, that items of ironware not traded in the market might be given them by the *bakelam* in return for their assistance. Further, as the owner of the *kelam*, the *bakelam* might simply ask anyone working in his *kelam* to help make him a hoe, cutlass or whatever.

(iii) *Wuuletuyin*

This specialist smith took no part in collecting old slag or preparing charcoal, nor did he pump the bellows or involve himself otherwise in smelting the bloom. His sole tasks were to forge hoes, cutlasses, spears, etc., on the small stone forging anvil where he worked permanently. This was considered to be the most difficult and skilled work in the Oku *kelam*. There was only one specialist smith for each *kelam*, and he was not necessarily a son of the *bakelam*. In such a case he would stay in his own compound. He did not sleep in the *kelam* and was not required to be celibate as was the case with the *wenfiibuu* specialist in the Babungo foundry. An apprentice that was seen to be able to forge ironware in the correct form without mistakes, might become *wuuletuyin* in a new *kelam* or take the place of another *Wuuletuyin* in an established *kelam*.

A *wuuletuyin* was well recompensed for his work and was in no way like a slave to the *bakelam*. The rewards that he received for his work were considerable. For instance, if asked by his *bakelam* to make two hoes 'he would be given materials to make three and would keep one hoe for himself. However, smithing might not be his sole occupation and he 'would certainly

not work every day in the *kelam*. On rest days and when the workers of his *kiham* had gone to collect slag or prepare charcoal he did not work. A *wuuletuyin* might keep bee-hives for honey, and others were hunters since there might be no work in the *kelam* for to a week or more while people were busy gathering material input the *bakelam* had a male slave he might train him to be a *wuuletuyi* he would only work as hard as a non-slave and, it was claimed, no untruthfully perhaps, that he would be treated equally with free members of the chiefdom.

(iv) Apprenticeship

The accounts offered by elderly informants of learning to smelt later to forge iron as a *wuuletuyin* illustrate the extended and diffuse nature of apprenticeship. A youth apprenticed to a non-ki *bakelam* would approach him and be asked to bring a fowl, some cooked food and also wine with which to feast the workers in the smithy. It was seen that he had learnt the work well he would be asked to repeat these gifts. When, finally, he had become proficient in the work he would be required to give the first hoe that he made to the man who had taught him. Nothing more would be done after that and might simply continue to work in the *kelam*.

The Process of Manufacture

(i) Material inputs: fuel

No dried wood chips or elephant grass stalks were used in Oku iron production as in Babungo, only charcoal proper. This was not sold but only made by the iron workers themselves or brought by someone wishing to exchange it for a hoe. In such a case the individual bringing the charcoal would also have to help in pumping the bellows and loading materials into the hearth. A party of 10 to 15 men went together to prepare charcoal. These would be all the men from the compound of the *bakelam* and, also, people from their ward who used to work in the *kelam*, who would be invited to come along and help. The group worked together to fell a very large tree and then individually prepared charcoal. Each dug his own depression in the ground and burnt the wood for about four hours before covering the heap with soil. The work was done over two days giving sufficient charcoal for the manufacture of one hoe. It seems likely that the lower heat efficiency of an

open bowl recycling furnace was offset by the savings in combining smelting and smithing simultaneously in the same heated hearth, but we should note that fuel constraints were probably not highly significant in Oku, given its location near one of the largest remaining stands of moist montane forest in the nineteenth-century Grassfields.

(ii) Material inputs: old slag

In the immediate pre-colonial period only old slag, termed *kissa-okvu*, was smelted in the Oku open bowl furnace. It was recognized as slag by Oku iron workers on the basis of fragments tuyeres and baked clay that they came across when digging it out was collected from many sites, most of which by this time were one day's journey from the main areas of settlement. One major site was Ntur, on the far side of the Oku massif overlooking the Ndop Plain, where Babungo traditions suggest iron smelting may have ceased in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.¹³

Parties of 10 to 15 men, recruited as for charcoal making, went and gathered the old slag and carried it back to Oku. If, after trying out slag from a particular location, it was found to yield well they would return again to the same site. To get sufficient slag to make a hoe it was necessary to go and carry it twice.¹⁴ In the German period Oku iron workers began to use natural ores, termed *kissa-irgbak*, 15 in addition to slag. The story is told of how a woman from another chiefdom, married to an Oku *bakelam*, saw this ore while farming and suggested to her husband that he should try it. The *bakelam* discovered that smelting a mix of ore and slag together yielded half as much bloom again as smelting slag alone. Ores were dug from the ground in shallow depressions in the form of rounded pellets, like a gravel. Men also went in groups in search of it but since it was available locally it took only one day's work to dig and fetch it. The ore was left to dry for up to two days so that it could be separated from adhering soil. It was then broken up into pieces of a size of about 2 square centimetres, similar to the way in which old slag was treated, and was then ready to be smelted.

(iii) Smelting and forging

The furnace was lit with embers from the house of the *bakelam*, and charcoal piled on top. An equal volume of ore and slag, in a single charge, was placed on top of the charcoal and more charcoal added as the smelt progressed. A series of two to three smelts, each of about three hours

duration, was necessary to produce sufficient bloom to make one hoe. These individual smelts were continuous and new slag produced was not removed until the entire process of making a hoe was complete.

The volume of slag, left to cool overnight, was variable, but a block of up to half a metre across might be removed from the base of the hearth. One such block found adjacent to the *kelam* of an informant was 0.07m^3 .¹⁶ The slag was thrown on one spot but there appear to be no heaps of slag in Oku on the scale to be seen in Babungo. Informants claimed that other organic debris from the *kelam* discarded with the slag decomposed into soil that covered the blocks of slag. Accordingly, black soil was said to be the best indicator of the debris from an Oku *kelam*. In recent times, however, slag has been used in house construction and this, together with the irregular topography of Oku, may partly account for the absence of visible heaps of debris.

The bloom removed from the hearth was cleaned of adhering ash and when all three blooms were prepared they were reheated till red hot and hammered together on the central stone anvil in a process which removed slag from the bloom. The shingled bloom was then reheated and welded to a long iron rod that was used to hold it while hammer into the shape of a hoe. It was then transferred to the smallest forging anvil where the specialist smith worked the iron into its finished form.

(iv) Products

It was stated by Oku informants that many *bakelam* made only hoe no other items of ironware and four out of five *kelam* listed for one central ward specialized solely in hoe production. This was said a response to the demand for hoes from Nso', both for its own use for trade with Nkambe and other northern areas. Traders from Nso said in the precolonial period to have come 'to buy hoes in those Specialization in hoe production may also have been related to that of hoes as the major part of Oku briaewealthpaYments.

Unlike Babungo, where a number of hoe types were made for export different markets in the region, only one hoe type was produced. This is reflected all through the range of Oku ironware products. Most significantly, only a small portion of the total range of items produced in an Oku smithy were sold, the bulk of ironware being acquired through informal gift exchange with the *bakelam* or through contributing labour in the workshop. The range of products is as below:

Oku Ironware

Item Description

fe-okuu Oku hoe, socketed, in various sizes. Used for bridewealth, 5 hoes p.a. for three years, plus 5 goats. Sold.

fiak-oku cutlass, one type only used for display, warfare, general purposes. Sold.

Spears

iwung-njak Barbed hunting spear, also used for warfare. Sold.

iwung-ikem Kom spear, unbarbed for travelling. sold.

kedjung Walking spear for men. Sold.

kedjung-mele Ornate spear with bells reserved for use by senior titleholders. Not sold.

mbang-kedjung Butt tip for walking spear. Sold

Knives

fefiak e lumen Man's knife for general purposes. Sold.

fefiak e ekii Women's farm knife for digging up yams, cleaning hoes, etc. Also called fiakepkan. Not sold.

fefiak e plang Small, womens' knife for peeling cocoyams, etc. Various sizes. Not sold.

Bells

mbeli se wan Child's anklet bell worn from one year on to encourage walking. Not sold.

mbel e bwe Dog bells for hunting. Not sold. Only as a gift to a hunter but *bakelam* would expect some meat in return.

mbele'etwium Worn by *kebai* titleholders on raffia bags. Copied from Bamum brass workers. Not sold.

Nggen "*kenifon*" double gongs, different sizes. Made only in *Fon's keIam*, so sale controlled by him.

Axes

njam-ekissa Large axe for splitting wood for charcoal. Called *njam njak* when used for cutting firewood. Sold.

fenjam-eptok Small axe used for cutting grooves and sockets in bamboo for building. Not sold since mostly used in Oku, might be given in return for help in making charcoal or collecting old slag.

Craft Tools

kencuuf Chisel for carving stools. Not sold.

kenkom Tool for hollowing out logs to make a drum. Not sold.

Kenleek Blackening tool. Not sold. Boring tool kept in *koelam*. Not sold.

Ko Boring tool kept in *koelam*. Not sold.

ntoke Tool for basket weaving. Not sold. Only as gifts to women since baskets used for food.

tas Very large needle for stitching up woven mats and raffia bags. Not sold.

Tapping Tools

ncief-yiluk Socketed tool, like a small hoe, used for cutting away area of raffia palm for tapping. Not sold. Only a gift but bakoelam would expect two calabashes of wine in return.

mbe-yiluk Tool for cleaning tapping area. Not sold. As above.

ikem kituu Razor, like a small knife. Not sold. Given to woman asking for one to shave head of newborn infant.

ncakse'ikoi Arm bangles for small children to cure scabies. Not sold.

iwung-evus Shot, lit. "Spears of fire", different sizes for different guns. Sold only to Oku people not sold to strangers.

ken gwaia Tool for striking flints to make fire. Not sold. Exchanged in return for small gift.

kentas Spoon, with cutlass type handle, for removing oil from calabash. Not sold

Conclusions

In order to highlight the major factors that promoted the high level of Babungo iron production and place this in its regional- context three topics will be reviewed. Firstly, the relative labour productivity of the Babungo industry will be compared with those of and Oku. Secondly, conclusions will be drawn from the various modes organization and recruitment of labour and provision for access to capital equipment and skills. Thirdly, the forms of specialization in iron production current in the Grassfields at the end of the nineteenth century will be looked at in order to gauge what constraints there may have been on the ability of the various systems to respond to changes in

external demand for ironware over time.

Comparative Labour Productivity

(i) We

Jeffreys¹⁸ observed the entire process of smelting iron ore to the manufacture of a hoe in We, c.40 kilometres to the north of Babungo. The smelting technology centred on a small free-standing cylindrical furnace with a single set of twin bellows supplying forced draught. Over 8 hours of smelting a total of 34 lbs of low grade limonite or mixed with slag and clay 'fluxes', plus 4 baskets of charcoal were consumed in order to produce a single bloom weighing 4.5 lbs. Seven blooms were required to produce one hoe weighing 4.5 lbs, which was also the approximate weight of a Babungo (*'soveno'*) hoe. On the occasion that Jeffreys observed the process another 1 lb of forgeable iron was recovered. This represents a return of only 13 percent of unshingled bloom from the mixed charge of ore and slag. From the 7 blooms weighing a total of 31.5 lbs only 6.5 lbs of forgeable iron was recovered, i.e. only 21 percent of the bloom was usable. In Babungo much higher return of unshingled bloom was obtained. Jeffreys' 1942 report suggests two blooms, each weighing c.40 lbs,¹⁹ were recovered from a total charge of 120 lbs of ore. This represents a return of c.66 percent of unshingled bloom from which c.26 lbs²⁰ of forgeable iron were obtained, i.e. 33 percent of the bloom was usable.

Analysis of samples of the low grade limonite ores apparently used in We showed an actual iron content of 18.7 percent.²¹ No analysis was made of the two ore types supposedly used in Babungo but the Executive Engineer's addendum to Jeffreys' report indicates that the theoretical content of haematite ores is c.70 percent and of good quality limonite ores it is c.57 percent. Analysis by Zacharias of Goethite ores used in the Ndop Plain area indicates a high Feo content of up to c.75 percent.

At the technical level it is possible to perceive a clear superiority in Babungo iron production that relates to the large volume of the charge of ore and fuel over the course of a single smelt and the recovery of a higher percentage of unshingled bloom. This may be explained in part, at least, by the use of higher grade ores but it seems likely that the capacity and thermal insulation²² afforded by the Babungo clump furnace was also significant.

In terms of labour productivity, the Babungo iron industry was more than eight times as efficient as that of the chiefdom of We. In Babungo c.6.5 man/labour days were required for the production of a hoe weighing 4.5 lbs.

In We, Jeffreys observed that it required 54 man/labour days to produce a hoe of similar weight. Gathering the ores and fuel, and the smelt itself, in order to produce a single bloom, were recorded by Jeffreys as entailing 7 man/labour days. The production of sufficient forgeable iron for a single hoe required seven such blooms. Another 5 man/labour days were required for forging the hoe.

(ii) Oku

In Oku a three-hour smelt by two to four men produced a bloom weighing 6 lbs and two to three of these blooms were needed to make a {single hoe, i.e. c.30 percent of the bloom represented usable iron. One man worked two days to get sufficient charcoal for the production of one bloom. At least four days were required to trek to the deposits .of old slag and dig and carry back sufficient materials for a hoe. Three men worked for one day to forge the hoe. Hence, this industry entailed a total of c.15 man/labour days to produce a single hoe.

Relative Productivity

	We	Oku	Babungo
Return of unshingled bloom from charge	13%	?	66%
Return of forgeable iron from bloom:	21%	30%	33% ²³
Man/labour days required to produce hoe:	54% ²⁴	15%	6.5%

This clearly indicates the marked variation in relative labour productivity of these three pre-colonial iron industries. In these terms the Babungo industry was clearly superior and highly efficient in relation to the other two industries. It was over twice as efficient as the open bowl furnace technology used in Oku, and more than eight times more efficient than the technology used in We. Accordingly, in relation to We, at least, we may view the technology and organization of work of the Babungo industry as representing a more highly developed industrial model that brought in significant economies of scale over those technologies using the simple cylindrical furnaces that existed elsewhere in the region.

However, neither economies of scale nor superior labour productivity explains the very high levels of production that are evidenced by the huge quantities of smelting debris to be seen in the chieftdom of Babungo. Nor do these factors explain how such high levels of production were achieved since, while the Babungo industry may have been relatively efficient by comparison

with other industries in the region, it still required enormous inputs of labour that had to be marshalled, organized and rewarded.

Labour, Equipment and Capitalisation

The comparative advantage of the technology employed in Babungo over the smaller scale and less developed technology in use at We is very clear. However, the advantage it may have enjoyed over Oku producers is considerably less and of such a low order of magnitude that it might well have been lost altogether in the inherent variability of the productive outcome. In this context the highly specialized nature of the role definitions allocated in Babungo to those involved in production and also the mode of recruitment of labour and the modes of access to the capital equipment of the industry seem particularly relevant to the understanding its success.

In Babungo the very narrow encapsulation of skills and knowledge represented by the exclusive celibacy of the specialist smelter (the *wenfibuu*), and the foundry-master's (*tunaa's*) knowledge of the medicines believed to be necessary for the successful operation of the foundry, should be borne in mind. This high level of expertise was made readily available to the non-specialist in return for relatively small payments of bloom or cowries. In Oku the situation was similar but involved a much less clear separation of smithing from the smelting arm of production. The open bowl furnace in the Oku workshop was not an item of apparently immense labour cost as was the clump furnace in the Babungo foundry and the process of iron production generally had none of the ritual prohibitions associated with smelting in Babungo. Whereas in Babungo the smiths constituted a separate and exclusive occupational group, in Oku the specialist smith, the *wuuletuyin*, operated in the workshop alongside those workers doing the smelting.

In contrast to most other sub-Saharan iron smelting industries the Babungo one was highly capitalised. Enormous initial inputs of labour and materials were required for foundry and furnace construction. The furnace was a massive and permanent structure and the huge²⁵ foundry had storage facilities, a complex arrangement of stone anvils and paved stone flooring. This degree of capitalisation appears to be unique and is clearly linked to: the extraordinary levels of output in the last century. The very large labour inputs entailed in this work were significant not simply for the material outcome but very importantly for the nature of the social relations engendered in the provision of labour to the master of the foundry, the *tunaa*, by kin, neighbours and others in return for access to foundry and furnace, smelting skills and 'medicines'.

It has been noted how technical elements, 26 including the use of high grade ores, in combination with a large furnace capacity, and a concomitantly large charge of fuel and ores, enabled the production of high volumes of bloom. This was achieved with the return of a higher percentage of unshingled bloom than was the 'case elsewhere in Grassfields iron industries. A pre-requisite of all this was the ability of the system in Babungo to provide for 'the recruitment of intensive labour at the point of foundry: construction and continuously throughout its working life in the preparation of material inputs for the actual smelting process. A major element in this was the facility of access to skills and equipment afforded to those who were not *tunaa*, nor linked to a *tunaa* by kin and lineage ties, in return for labour and materials. This arose directly from the very high degree of capitalisation of the Babungo foundry whereby the enormous input of labour from kin and non-kin alike served to bind up a whole series of patron/client relations that promised to keep the foundry in operation over extended periods of time and to result in large material benefits, in bloom, charcoal and other gifts to the *tunaa* that were quite distinct from any profits that accrued from his own use of the foundry. This was probably the crucial feature in promoting such high levels of production. The binding up of social relations between foundry owner and foundry user, through the contribution of the latter of labour and materials in furnace and foundry construction, represented a high investment in future demand for ironware and provided both the initial impetus and the momentum that guaranteed the continuity of production.

The limiting factor was the finite nature of the labour supply. It is tempting to use the facile explanation of rich soils and high population density on the plain versus poor soils and low population density on the uplands to explain the inability of the upland centres to increase capacity in order to compete with less capital-intensive open bowl recycling industries. Certainly, early colonial demographic data indicate that the populations of Babungo and Bamessing (Nsei) were many times greater than those associated with individual centres of production recorded by Jeffreys in Nso', Oku, Kom and other areas.

Of direct relevance to the total available labour was the co-operative nature of mutual labour assistance that existed between those who did not have their own foundry and foundry owners, which enabled them to meet the high labour and material costs incurred in gathering the necessary material inputs for individual smelts. In the minds of informants this cooperation was based on the traditional model of the rotating savings association, the *shwaa*, and clearly served to amass labour for production in

the same way as the savings association capitalise' currency for trade ventures and bridewealth.

The situation in Oku was similar albeit on a smaller scale, with lower material and labour inputs required both for workshop construction and the smelting operation. In both chiefdoms informants stressed the availability of access to the equipment of iron production to non-kin. However, in Oku a large portion of non-kin labour was contributed with the single goal of acquiring ironware not normally obtainable through market exchange. In Babungo *all* items forged in the smithy, apart from those reserved by sumptuary laws, were sold in the smith's compound or in the market. The organization of production was such that no one contributed labour in order to acquire an item of finished ironware. The exclusive specialization of Babungo smiths precluded the participation of non-smiths in the process of production.

In both chiefdoms the contribution of non-kin labour to the *tunaa* of the Babungo foundry and the *bakelam* of the Oku foundry/smithy was reciprocated by granting access to the equipment and specialist skills of *wenjiibuu* and *wuuletuyin*. In Oku this permitted non-kin to gather the necessary material inputs, work alongside the *bakelam* in the process of smelting and then receive the finished products of *wuuletuyin*, less his payment in kind. In Babungo this allowed access to the foundry for the production of bloom which was then sold for cowries which, in turn, might be exchanged in the market for ironware or some other trade commodity. In both chiefdoms the smith is a specialist who does no other work, and non-specialist labour is only contributed in the smelting process. In Oku the relationship between the specialist smith, *wuuletuyin*, and the labour of non-specialists is reciprocal. In Babungo this is a formal *economic* relationship mediated through the market place by the use of the cowry currency as a medium of exchange.

Modes of Specialization

Objectively, the process of transforming ore into a finished item of ironware can be divided up into any number of stages allocated to any number of different sets of personnel. At least three general models of specialization were current in the Grassfields in the immediate pre-colonial period.

One involved smithing and smelting by one set of personnel in the same workshop, using the open bowl furnace to recycle slag, as in Oku, Kom, Bamessing (after its return from its temporary refuge to the Ndop Plain) and

elsewhere. A second is exemplified by the Babungo industry, where smith and smelter were separate occupational categories with distinct personnel and workshops. This was also the case in We, Esu and also in Bamessing prior to its adoption of an open bowl furnace technology. A third model of specialization occurred where one chiefdom smelted blooms of iron which were then sold to the smiths of another chiefdom for forging. This relationship existed between the smelters of Mbebeje and the smiths of Kwaja, Gom and Lus²⁷ and also between Bafanji and Bamenyam.²⁸ In many more areas Jeffreys recorded traditions that indicated that separate smithing and smelting within a chiefdom had once been practised. These industries were said to have been abandoned in favour of the more lucrative opportunities afforded by trade, especially in the chiefdom in the north of the region, such as Bum, Nyos, Kuk and Mme.²⁹

The use of open bowl furnaces has to postdate an earlier industry, and probably a clump furnace technology, since it was feeding off the debris produced in such furnaces. It is as though the highly labour-intensive smelting side of the earlier systems collapsed or condensed leaving only smithing as the organizing principle behind production. The organization of the Oku recycling industry supports this notion. It lacks the sexual proscriptions and beliefs associated with smelting elsewhere and it is the specialist smith who retains, exclusively, the skills of forging and who most often became master of the forge-foundry in his turn.

Bafanji informants³¹ distinguished two distinct modes of allocating the task of shingling bloom linked to the two furnace types in use concurrently in that chiefdom in the nineteenth century. In the first, associated with the traditional Bafanji furnace, the task of shingling bloom was performed in the foundry by smelters, who sold the iron cleaned of slag to the smiths. In the second, associated with the developed Babungo furnace type, of which two were built in Bafanji, blooms were sold whole, or in lumps, to the smiths for shingling in the smithy. There is evidence to suggest that what was concurrent in Bafanji occurred consecutively in Babungo, the changeover in furnace type usage being linked to a reallocation of the task of shingling bloom. The evidence from the Bakwang foundry (which preceded the new type), where every single stone of the flooring was pitted with depressions, suggests strongly that these earlier smelters themselves reduced the bloom to crystals of iron and slag powder to be discarded. In contrast, smelters using a developed Babungo furnace sold the blooms more or less intact to smiths to do their own shingling.

Two vestiges of the earlier situation appear to persist. Firstly, youths continued to mechanically extract iron crystals from the slag on the stones in

the foundry. Secondly, when the main blooms had been extracted from the cake of slag at the end of a smelt in the developed Babungo clump furnace they were taken and placed on a stone anvil and a short word of thanks said with reverence to the spirit of the foundry. This stone anvil was precisely the one which in an older Bakwang type foundry would have been used to separate the iron from the slag included in the bloom. It is as though this action represents an acknowledgement to an earlier system of work in which the bloom had been mechanically treated to separate iron and slag within the foundry.

Babungo smiths stressed very strongly that the most arduous task in traditional smithing was the process of shingling the bloom into forgeable iron.³² When European scrap iron became available in sufficient quantities the smiths quickly abandoned the smelters of the chiefdom to their collective fate and turned to smithing scrap iron simply because it was easier to work. If the situation had been reversed and, as may have been the case in Bamessing, smelting was given up in favour of some more lucrative trade, it would have been only slightly more costly, in terms of labour, for the smiths to continue by using slag rather than ore as a source material.³³

So it appears that a package of high labour costs was transferred from smelters to smiths as part of the transformation from the Bakwang to the developed Babungo furnace. This in itself would increase the productivity of smelting, albeit at the expense of the smiths. It is highly unlikely that smiths would accept this unless at the same time they were gaining some advantage from the higher productivity and output of the newer furnace types, presumably in the form of less costly bloom.

While the superior productivity of recent Babungo smelting techniques over those in use at We and Esu is indisputable, any comparison with earlier clump furnace technologies is on shakier ground. Without the evidence of direct observation or detailed comparative analysis of the inputs and outputs recoverable from furnace and smelting debris it is only possible to speculate. Babungo informants stressed the belief that their ancestors had given up the smaller clump furnaces in favour of the developed form which yielded twice as much bloom. It is clear that these traditions conceal great compression of the stages involved in the transformation of furnace structures. However, if it is accepted for the sake of argument that the *older* smaller clump furnaces produced only half the volume of bloom, perhaps for a smelt of similar duration then a very striking point arises. The labour productivity of the *older* clump furnaces and the Oku open bowl re-smelting industry, based on the exploitation of the debris created by that industry, would have been virtually identical. Given this likely equivalence, together with the high cost of

establishing the clump furnace foundry and the availability of large deposits of smelting debris created by the old clump furnace industry, it seems as if it would not have taken a very great shove for the latter to collapse and a condensed smithing industry, re-smelting old slag, to emerge.

Hence the characteristically high degree of capitalisation associated with clump furnace technologies, set against the low degree of capitalisation required for an open bowl recycling industry together with very close comparative labour productivity, suggests an explanation for the demise of the older small clump furnaces that does not depend on hypothetical changes in external demand. It seems plausible to suggest that once the innovation to a slag recycling industry had occurred in one location within the region of clump furnace industries³⁴ this would have had an immediate, and possibly devastating, effect on the remaining traditional centres. Although roughly equivalent in terms of labour productivity the open bowl industry would have had a significant comparative cost advantage over the larger-scale clump furnace users. The latter was highly capitalised and very labour intensive while the former did not require an enormous investment of labour in furnace and foundry construction and, by reason of the smaller labour and material inputs associated with this technology, would have been more flexible in its response to market conditions.

It is almost as though the high degree of capitalisation of the old clump furnace industries, the very characteristic that enabled them to attain such high levels of production and supply very wide area with ironware, actually bore the seeds of their demise. If labour and capital costs became overwhelming in the face of a finite labour supply and so resulted in the collapse of smelting and the emergence of 'enhanced smithing' re-smelting old slag this would, in turn, have undercut the remaining clump furnace centres, except for those able to innovate to achieve an increase in capacity so as to gain the vantage of economies of scale.³⁵ The physical evidence of change in furnace forms and the associated distribution and lumes of debris from Babungu may be taken to suggest that the transition from the old, small capacity, Bakwang furnaces to the larger capacity developed clump furnace type did not simply occur a response to a dramatic increase in demand for its products. Indeed, the concentration of old Bakwang furnace sites linked to a very high percentage of associated smelting debris in a small central area of the chiefdom suggests a pre-existing high level demand. It seems plausible, then, that the Babungu innovation y have represented a means of maintaining competitiveness in the wider market for ironware, to which it was so highly fitted, against those centres which had abandoned highly

capital intensive iron production for more flexible and less stly open bowl re-smelting of old slag.

The latter, in their turn, while less constrained by finite labour resources, would necessarily have been checked at some point by the inevitable exhaustion of finite deposits of old slag, or by increasing transportation costs. This was clearly the case for Oku which, having virtually exhausted local sources of slag early in this century, innovated by switching to smelting a fifty-fifty mix of slag and true ore. In both Oku and Nso' slag was still, in the 'seventies, recognized as a valuable resource m which iron might be obtained even when the true origin of the material had become obscured. In the uplands between Babungo d Kom, Oku and Nso' all debris heaps visible from trade paths

The volume of Babungo production in the late nineteenth century clearly betokens an enormous external demand for its products. The Oku industry cannot have been insulated from this external demand. Oku investment in the kola trade was almost certainly more important in the colonial period. When, early in the dry season of 1889, Zintgraff looked south from Din for his return route to Bali Nyonga, he observed the northern slopes of the Oku massif covered with the smoke palls of the Oku charcoal burners.³⁹ Accordingly, it may be asked where were the constraints that hindered the Oku iron industry from reaching levels of production similar to those of Babungo?

Firstly, while it is one thing to 'devolve' from a clump furnace technology to an open bowl type, it is quite a different matter to go in the opposite direction, and there is no evidence from the multitude of iron-working sites in the region or from oral traditions that this may have occurred. It does seem reasonable to suggest, however, that the structure of specialisation in Babungo, whereby smith and smelter were separate economic and productive entities mediated by extraneous currencies and trade goods, may have allowed the penetration of market forces to a far greater extent than would have been the case in Oku where both arms of iron production were subsumed in a single occupational category under a single head, the *bakelam*, and in one location, the *kelam*. If this state of affairs were to be put together with an assumed productive superiority over earlier clump furnace technologies, then we may arrive at some understanding of how the comparative advantage of the Babungo iron industry enabled the development of such high levels of production in response to external demand for its products in the latter part of the nineteenth century had been levelled and only those hidden off the beaten track remained untouched. To

the west it was claimed that open bowl smelters from Kom trekked up to 45 miles in search of slag found in the vicinity of Santa.³⁶

It seems more plausible to infer that such increasing transportation costs prompted greater Oku investment in the kola trade rather than assume that the opportunities afforded by demand for kola put iron production out of commission. This is too simplistic a notion.³⁷ In fact there is no real conflict between these activities, for the harvesting and trading of kola falls in the dry season and does not compete directly with the allocation of labour to wet season iron production. The high profitability of the kola trade noted in 1925 by Drummond-Hay³⁸ in a period in which long-distance trade offered fewer hazards than in pre- or early colonial times, cannot be used to explain the cessation of iron production in the nineteenth century in subsequent kola-producing areas.

The volume of Babungo production in the late nineteenth century clearly betokens an enormous external demand for its products. The Oku industry cannot have been insulated from this external demand. Oku investment in the kola trade was almost certainly more important in the colonial period. When, early in the dry season of 1889, Zintgraff looked south from Din for his return route to Bali Nyonga, he observed the northern slopes of the Oku massif covered with the smoke palls of the Oku charcoal burners.³⁹ Accordingly, it may be asked where were the constraints that hindered the Oku iron industry from reaching levels of production similar to those of Babungo?

Firstly, while it is one thing to 'devolve' from a clump furnace technology to an open bowl type, it is quite a different matter to go in the opposite direction, and there is no evidence from the multitude of iron-working sites in the region or from oral traditions that this may have occurred. It does seem reasonable to suggest, however, that the structure of specialisation in Babungo, whereby smith and smelter were separate economic and productive entities mediated by extraneous currencies and trade goods, may have allowed the penetration of market forces to a far greater extent than would have been the case in Oku where both arms of iron production were subsumed in a single occupational category under a single head, the *bakelam*, and in one location, the *kelam*. If this state of affairs were to be put together with an assumed productive superiority over earlier clump furnace technologies, then we may arrive at some understanding of how the comparative advantage of the Babungo iron industry enabled the development of such high levels of production in response to external demand for its products in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Allocation of Beliefs

The conceptual basis of the separation of smith and smelter is expressed in different mythical origins and distinct mystical associations. The smelting founders of the Babungo chiefdom emerge from a cave behind a waterfall, a route which denotes associations with the ancestors who live beneath the earth and who reach it by passing through water. The founders emerge from this enclosure within the earth⁴⁰ through the water bearing the 'medicines' which will enable them to extract fecundity from the earth to produce bloom and children, i.e. the wealth of the chiefdom. The 'medicines' and sorcery that facilitate this are socially controlled through cooperation, patronage and sharing of the products. In contrast, the ancestor of the smiths falls from the sky, the world of powerful combative mythical beings. In some versions⁴¹ he may descend on a spider's web or the iron hammer he bears may be wrapped in such a web. Fragments from the 'original' hammer are incorporated into each new one made by smiths and embody continuity with the world of powerful sky spirits that is expressed in the power to issue mortal oaths. This hammer is described as *nshwe fa mbi*, i.e. the most important thing (lit. the mother-thing) in the world; with it the smith can make and unmake and he is associated with powerful 'medicines' that serve as defence against the predations of hostile witches.

The smith and smelter are conceptually conjoined in the figure of the spider whose web appears to float mysteriously down from the sky and yet who lives in a hole in the ground. The spider links the world of the ancestors below with the world above of sky spirits and represents wisdom incarnate. By association the smith and smelter share these attributes. The smelter transforms the earth into riches, ore into bloom, and represents peace and prosperity. The smith represents power and aggression and will defend the chiefdom against attack both with sorcery and with his physical strength.

There is evidence of former large-scale modes of iron working in the form of clump furnace remains, associated debris, and oral traditions for parts of Kom, Oku, Nso', northern Bamum, the southern Ndop Plain and the western Bamenda plateau. This evidence implies a former separation of smithing and smelting since it is not possible to use a clump furnace for forging ironware. In most of these areas, apart from Bagham and the western Ndop Plain, this form of production ceased in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries and these industries devolved or 'condensed' into combined open bowl smithing and smelting exploiting slag produced by the earlier clump furnaces. What had once been conceptually distinct mythic and

mystical associations were recombined in different ways in different chiefdoms.

In Oku, for instance, these elements appear to have been stripped out and iron-working becomes largely demythologised. The *Fon* is still closely linked to iron-working and is buried with an Oku hoe whereas in Babungo the last three *Fons* were buried with blooms.⁴² However, in Bafut iron-smelting has somehow become inimical to the ritual powers of the elders and a form of symbolic ritual avoidance arises between the *Fon* and iron so the it is forbidden to approach him bearing objects of iron.⁴³ But perhaps this is because the common Grassfields prohibition against carrying iron weapons in the *Fon's* presence at audience has here become exaggerated following a serious succession dispute in the late 1960S.⁴⁴ In Bamum, where only smithing persisted at the end of the nineteenth century, Njoya strongly desired⁴⁵ to acquire the secrets of iron-smelting and, having failed to manoeuvre *Fon* Sangge of Babungo into passing them on him, had the Tikar build a furnace in the palace precincts. It is noteworthy that while there are some clear parallels in the processes of emergence of the large polities of Bafut and Bamum there is no obvious disassociation of the Bamum king from objects of iron. He is said, for instance, to have been buried with three double gongs, ten spears, and two swords (Geary, 1983).

One cannot easily generalize for Grassfields notions of the conceptual framework of iron production on the basis of any single centre where the large-scale mode of production has ceased and the nature of associated beliefs has taken its own direction Babungo and Bagham appear to be the only centres⁴⁶ that retained the large-scale mode of production and even though the high levy of output in the former chiefdom may have tended to banalise aspects of associated belief, it seems plausible to suggest that those that remain are more closely representative of beliefs current in the region at an earlier point in time.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Professor J.P. Warnier, Dr Christraud Geary c Elizabeth M. Chilver for unpublished information, to David Killick for critical comments on iron technology and to Emmanuel Nchio-Minkee, of Babungo, for his invaluable help during 1975.

Endnotes

1. Babungo smelters made use of elephant grass stems for pre-heating the furnace, and a mixture of dried wood chips and charcoal in proportions of 5:2. Wood chips were obtained from six species of local trees, cuttings from which were annually planted on compound land, thus ensuring future supplies. Charcoal was made from raffia palm stems, a source of revenue for wine-tappers who almost all belonged to the clan of Ba Gweju, the installer: his ward abutted on a huge tract of raffia palm. Old trees past productive use for palm-wine and fibre were used, so ensuring the regeneration of raffia stands. There are Babungo traditions of early nineteenth-century conflicts in the Kwa'nso' area between Babungo charcoal makers, producing ordinary charcoal for blacksmithing and Nso' elements, echoed in Nso' traditions (Chilver, 1984). The economical use of charcoal prevented sharp competition between smiths and smelters for resources. The Oku recycling industry, using only charcoal, was located near one of the remaining stands of montane forest, now greatly depleted by other uses.

2. 'Bakwang' refers to a smelting site in the foothills overlooking the Ndop Plain, associated in local oral traditions with a population called Bakwang or Bunkwang, dispersed by raids in the second half of the nineteenth century. Two furnaces were found with five debris heaps with a total volume of c.1000m³. One item was cleared to investigate the furnace structure and foundry lay-out, debris examined and material samples taken for laboratory analysis and dating. There were other sites and variations in furnace structure in the area for which see Fowler (1989).

3. A slag sample from an open hearth smelting furnace in Oku was subjected to compositional analysis and the result compared with slag from non-recycling furnaces. This sample had a lower iron content and relatively higher manganese, potassium and calcium contents, indicating that it is the product of re-smelting old slag. According to Oku ironworkers the sources of this slag for re-smelting were sites at Ibal-Oku, Ntur and in Oku itself, the bal-Oku'slag deposits being exploited early in the twentieth century. The chemical composition of a sample collected at an *old* surface debris site in Oku is almost identical with one taken from surface smelting debris at Ntur. Barring accidents – such as at the Oku sample had been laboriously carried from Ntur and mislaid – the homogeneity of the samples suggests that the older dustries which produced them were virtually identical. If so, a continuity between the older clump furnace industries which produced the

slag and the more recent re-smelting tradition might posited. Oku dynastic traditions neither support nor preclude is supposition.

4. Drummond-Hay, 1925.

5. 1942 and 1962.

6. This trade generated the wealth that enabled specialist trading chiefdoms to tap into both continental and coastal spheres of trade and make highly profitable conveyances between them. This is confirmed by data gathered independently in Oku and Babungo concerning the activities of traders from Bangolan who took slaves to both iron-producing chiefdoms where identical rates of exchange prevailed before the early twentieth century inflation of cowry values – 30 hoes for a female and 10 hoes with some cowries in addition for a male.

7. This could still be seen, in a state of disrepair, before the palace in the late 'seventies.

8. Baumann and Vajda, 1959, reporting the much earlier work of Ankermann. It is unclear whether Bafum here refers to Bum (Bafum-Bum), Mme (Bafum-Me), or Esu (Bafum-Katse).

9. See Oku Tool Inventory, next section.

10. This member of the workshop personnel took no part in smelting but only forged ironware.

11. Note that the bellows depicted in Emonts (2nd Ed. 1927, p.175) are not from Oku but actually resemble closely those depicted by Maes (1930) for the Mosengere of the Lake Leopold region. A few plates in this work derive from photographs taken by other missionaries serving in Africa.

12. 16 days.

13. Traditions collected in the northern Ndop Plain chiefdoms suggest that the populations associated with iron-smelting sites, such as Ibal-Oku and Ntur, were absorbed into the more compact and centralized chiefdoms that emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the area. Traditions from Kom, Nso', Oku and Big Babanki (Kijem Keku) point to a

pre-nineteenth-century pattern of land use for the upland areas which centred on pasturing dwarf short-horn cattle, smelting and smithing iron and shifting settlement patterns, such as are associated with people called Ntur (or Ntut) and Jem or Kijem. The capture of herds of dwarf short-horn cattle to provision Ga Wolbe's raiding groups finds a place in Bali Nyonga traditions (Chilver, Bali fieldnotes, 1960, 1963).

14. This may be an error in which case the labour productivity of the Oku industry must be revised upwards.

15. Also called *kissa-bwa* and *mbon*. Samples of ores used by Babungo smelters were taken and shown to Oku ironworkers by the researcher; they claimed that this was the kind of ore they started to use.

16. This is only a little less than the average volume of slag that was estimated to have been produced in the course of a Babungo smelt.

17. Actually 'dozens' in the context of Grassfields trade means tens.

18. 1942.

19. This weight refers to the integral blooms and not smaller pockets of bloom broken out of slag by youths assisting in the foundry.

20. There was consensus amongst informants that each bloom yielded sufficient forgeable iron to make three Babungo hoes each weighing c.4.5 lbs.

21. This is of very low quality by comparison with the higher grade Goethite limonite ores used in the Ndop Plain. The detailed observations made by Jeffreys seem to indicate that this was ore that was actually about to be smelted and was not tailings. It is not clear, however, how homogeneous this ore may have been and Jeffreys' sample was probably quite small in volume and so not necessarily representative of the overall quality of the ore.

22. At present there is no direct evidence as to the temperature attained in the Babungo furnace. Recent work on African smelting technologies (Merwe, N.J. van der, and Avery D.H., 1982) has suggested that a pre-heated airflow enabled temperatures of c.1800°C in association with a reducing atmosphere to be achieved by Buhaya smelters giving a direct yield of medium to high calibre steel. However, the point has not been emphasized

sufficiently that any advantage entailed in this was immediately lost when the Buhaya smiths proceeded to completely decarburise this steel by heating it in the hottest, most oxidizing, area of the forge hearth. It appears to have been common for bloom extracted from the furnace as steel to be largely decarburised during forging (see Todd and Charles, 1978). For a much earlier discussion of the relationship between airflow and carburisation in sub-Saharan smelting see Achinard (1884).

23. The percentage return of forgeable iron from the original charge of ore in Babungu was c.22 percent which compares very favourably with that attained by the Sukur smelters (Sassoon, 1964), using similar furnaces, where 16 lbs of forged iron was got from 200lbs of ore giving a percentage return of only 8 percent. However, see pole (1983) for a discussion of the variability of output recorded from Sukur foundries. Using similar high quality ores but a very different tall cylindrical furnace technology the smelters of Bassari appear to have achieved a 23 percent return of unshingled bloom from the charge of ore and a very high 73 percent return of forgeable iron from the unshingled bloom (von Luschan, 1909).

24. This figure may seem high but ought to be set in the context of other sub-Saharan smelting practices. For instance, in their reconstruction of smelting amongst groups in Malawi, von der Merwe and Avery (1987) determined the cost of a single hoe at contemporary labour rates as c.\$250 (US). Paying \$1.50 for a smelter and 70 cents per day for a helper gives a labour cost of between 167 and 357 man/labour days to produce a single hoe. If we take a figure in the middle of this range we arrive at a cost of c.250 man/labour days or five times the cost of the We operation and nearly forty times that of the developed Babungu clump furnace.

25. Bertho (1946) reports a similarly large structure for the Oedougou smithy, some 11m by 8ms in plan and 2.75ms in height.

26. In addition to these features Sassoon (1963) has noted that “The most ingenious (furnace) type has the air-pipe passing from the top down through the centre, the bellows being behind and above the top of the furnace. This design supplies pre-heated air, a refinement which was introduced a little over a century ago into the iron-smelting industry in England”.

27. Jeffreys, 1942.

28. Warnier and Fowler, 1979.

29. Mme, according to Moseley (1899), commanded a limited area of palm oil production.

30. Many sub-Saharan smelters used old slag as a so-called 'flux' along with true ore. Bellamy (1904) describes Yoruba smelting practice where 15 lbs of selected slag was smelted along with 50 lbs of iron ore. The smelters of the 'Glazed Sherds' industry also added slag to the charge (Warnier and Rowlands, 1988). No slag was added in the clump furnace smelting process but there was a grey area between true bloom and heavy lumps of slag with bloom inclusions which would facilitate movement towards shingling/re-smelting slag in the hearth of the smithy.

31. Warnier, unpublished fieldnotes.

32. This is an important point to take into account when attempting to assess the value of relative labour inputs. It may be overly simplistic to count man labour days without regard to the perceived difficulty and burdensome nature of the tasks concerned.

33. Laboratory analysis of old slag from the region (Jeffreys, 1942, and Zacharias, 1979) indicates a relatively uniform and high iron content. Also, the process of re-smelting old slag in Oku virtually replicates what had to be done to shingle a bloom in Babungo in order to make it into a forgeable mass of iron.

34. There are some tantalising hints that this may have occurred in the central northern area of the Grassfields. Tang-Mbo informants claim that when they reached their present settlement they found iron working Oku settled nearby and drove them south. Similarly, smelting debris located to the north of the Oku massif at Jottin-Bu is locally attributed to Ntur elements (Jeffreys, Tribal Notes, n.d.) which by the immediate precolonial period are located to the south of the Oku massif, again in association with smelting debris. Further, the 'Taavisa' (*visa* refers to slag in Lamnso') area was allegedly occupied by Vedo'o clans of Mfumte (i.e. northern) origin when Nso' took refuge there (Kaberry, 1963, fieldnotes). This suggests movements of slag seeking groups toward the centre of the region that, in these traditions, are invoiced backwards in time.

35. There is evidence from Bafanji (Warnier, fieldnotes) that two larger developed Babungo type clump furnaces were built, probably in the first half of the nineteenth century. Bafreng claim to have learnt to build large clump furnaces from Babungo (Chilver, 1963, fieldnotes). It does appear that attempts were made to increase furnace capacity so as to gain economies of scale and that the larger Bamessing furnaces probably fall into this category.

36. Jeffreys, correspondence with the Director of the Geological Survey at Kaduna, dated 22.7.1942.

37. Jeffreys, 1961, recorded statements in Oku to the effect that before and during the period of German colonial rule *all* Oku men were iron-workers and that it was only in the British period that people gave it up for trade to Ibi and the coast. In the 1970s informants claimed that formerly iron-working was 'their only source of income' and was abandoned once coffee planting began. It was said that many people were afraid to take up iron-working because it required much physical strength and 'power', in the sense of the expenditure of mystical energies. In fact Oku iron-workers will, individually, have also profited from trading their skills in carving, divination and various kinds of 'medicine'.

38. Ndop Assessment Report, 1925. Para. 254. Each kola tree produces anything from 40,000 to 50,000 nuts per year and at 5/- to 10/- per 1000 this gives an average income of c. £17 for one tree.

Para. 255. In Oku kola forms the chief article of trade. Last year kola was being sold at 5/- per 1000 nuts, this year it is being sold at 10/- per 1000 nuts, and was being retailed to Hausa traders in the market at 12/- per 1000 nuts. The average Oku trader sells from 1000-2000 nuts in a day, and his profit is therefore 2/- or 4/-. Taking it that there are 45 market days in the year and that he attends each one and that his average profit is 3/-, the stay-at-home kola middleman makes an annual income of £6 15s Ode But many of these kola traders take the kola to Takum where this year kola was being sold at £1 per 1000 nuts. To Takum from Oku is a six-day journey, so that allowing one day for the sale of his kola and one day for the buying of other goods, the profit on 1000 nuts (a one-man load) is 10/- in 14 days. Supposing that the trader does 15 journeys in the year his profit from kola alone is £7, without taking into account the profit he may make from the sale of goods which he buys in Takum.

39. Zintgraff, 1895.

40. Nso' myths include the tale that the Nggoylum group of iron-workers disappeared down into a hole in the ground (Kaberry, 1960, fieldnotes).

41. In the myth of origin of the Pa'ti iron-workers they are said to descend from the sky on a spider's web (Chilver, Bali fieldnotes, 1963).

42. This was observed when the skulls of these *Fons* were moved to the present palace site.

43. Rowlands, personal communication.

44. In earlier times (Chilver and Kaberry, Bafut fieldnotes, 1960) men seeking advancement in palace societies presented hoes to the royal burial place (*nefum*); after being left at the graves they were given out to *Fon*'s wives cultivating the royal farms. Sacrifices at the royal graves included the scraping of hoes with a knife so that filings were conducted into the libation channels. After the end of mourning for a *Fon*, during which hoeing and ridging had to cease, hoes were again scraped to ask for the blessing of the dead *Fons* and *Nsi* (divinity) on farmwork. It was explained that a *Fon* when alive rules subject to the earth's judgement and when buried 'changes' and has the power to transform the earth into wealth: so hoes are scraped to the dead *Fons* in request for everything in the ground that brings prosperity, including iron (*atua*). Ritual practices in Bafut appeared to reflect the very close identity of metaphors, common throughout the Grassfields, which express the transformative powers that underpin both kingship and iron-working. In Nso' it was formerly the practice for the women's societies (*cong*) to bring their hoes to the palace entrance to be aspersed at the start of the farming season (Kaberry, 1958, fieldnotes).

45. Rein-Wuhrmann, 1925.

46. Bamenyam and Bafanji each dropped one half of the two elements of large-scale modes of production. There is evidence at Bafanji, at least, in the form of smelting debris that it formerly had performed both smithing and smelting (Warnier, fieldnotes). As in the case of Bamessing, this may be linked to the serious effects of settlement displacement on the capacity of the regrouped population to recruit, marshal and reward the intensive labour required for iron production.

References

ACHINARD, M.L., 1884. 'La fabrication du fer dans le Soudan', *Revue d'ethnographie*, 3.

ADAMETZ, Hptm., 1913. 'Bericht über die Ergebnisse einer wirtschaftlichen Erkundung in Bezirk Bamenda', unpublished TS, National Archives Yaounde, No. FA 1/736.

ANKERMANN, B., 1910. 'Bericht über eine ethnographische Forschungsreise ins Grasland von Kamerun', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 42.

-----, 1959. 'Bernhard Ankermanns volkerkundliche Aufzeichnungen im Grasland von Kamerun, 1907-1909'. Herausgegeben und bearbeitet von H. Baumann und L. Vajda, *Baessler-Archiv*, N.F. VII (2).

BELLAMY, C.V., 1904. 'A West African Smelting House', *Journal of the Iron and steel Institute*, 66 (2).

BERTHO, J., 1946. 'Note sur le haut-fourneau et la forge des Bobo-Oule (Bobo rouges) de Degougou (Haute Cote d'Ivoire)'. *Notes Africaines*, 30.

CHILVER, E.M., 1984. 'The Ve Do'o or Do' Clan of Nso', roneo, unpublished, KRC, Bamenda.

-----, Various dates. Fieldnotes 1958, 1960, 1963, MS.
Some duplicate sets at MESIRES (ISH).

DRUMMOND-HAY, J.C., 1925. 'An Assessment Report on the Ndop Plain area', unpublished TS, National Archives Buea.

ECHARD, N., 1983. *Metallurgies Africaines*, Paris.

EMONTS, J., 1927. *Ins steppen- und Bergland Innerkameruns*, 2nd edition (1st edition 1922), Aachen.

FOWLER, I., 1989. *Babungo: a study of iron production, trade and power in a nineteenth century Ndop Plain Chiefdom*, Ph.D. Thesis, Anthropology, University College, unpublished.

-----, forthcoming. *Metal Working in Africa: the Rise and Fall of an African Baltimore*.

GEARY, Christraud, 1983. *Things of the Palace*, Studien zur Kulturkunde No.60, Stuttgart.

GOUCHER, C.L., 1981. 'Iron is iron 'til it is rust: Trade and Ecology in the Decline of West African Iron-Smelting'. *Journal of African History*, 22 (2).

GULLEMAIN, -, 1908. 'Ergebnisse geologische Erforschung im deutschen Schutzgebiet Kamerun', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 21 (1).

HASSERT, K., 1917. 'Beiträge zur Landeskunde der Grashochländer

Nord-West Kameruns', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 13.

HIRTLE, Olt., 1903. 'Kamerun: Bericht des Oberleutnant Hirtle über eine Dienstreise von Bamenda nach Babessi', *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, 14 (12).

'HUTTER, F., 1905. *Wanderungen und Forschungen" im Nord-Hinterland von Kamerun*, Braunschweig.

JEFFREYS, M.D.W., n.d. (mainly 1937-1944). 'Tribal Notes', unpublished TSS, Bamenda Archives; copies also in Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde.

----- 1942. 'Report on the local iron industry, Bamenda Division', unpublished, Bamenda Archives.

----- 1942a. 'Addenda to B.2142/64 of 13th February, 1942', unpublished TS, Bamenda Archives. (Extracts from the above were later published in slightly amended form, as below).

_____, 1952, 'Some notes on the Bikom Smiths', *Man*, 75

_____, 1961, 'Oku Blacksmiths', *Nigerian Field*, 26(3).

_____, 1962, 'Some notes on the Kwaja Smiths', *Man*, 47.

_____, 1962a, 'Some notes on the Bum', *Nigerian Field*, 27.

KABERRY, Phyllis M., various dates. Fieldnotes 1945-6, 1947-8, 1958, 1960, 1963, original MSS and TSS, and connected correspondence, with a hand-list by David-Price, Manuscripts Division, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.

1977. *Kamerun - Konige, Masken, Feste*, Stuttgart.

1958. *Phytogeographie Camerounaise*, Yaounde.

LUSCHAN, F. von, 1909. 'Eisentechnik in Afrika', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 41.

MAES, J., 1930. 'La metallurgie chez les populations du Lac Leopold II, Lukenie', *Ethnologica*, 4.

MALCOLM, L.W.G., 1924. 'Iron-working in the Central Cameroons', *Man*, 102.

MARET, P. de, 1980. 'Preliminary report on 1980 fieldwork in the Grassfields and Yaounde, Cameroon', *Nyame Akuma*, XVII.

----- 1982. 'New archaeological research and dates from West-Central and Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, 32.

MERWE, N.J. van der, and AVERY, D.H., 1982. 'Pathways to Steel', *American scientist*, 70.

----- 1987. 'Science and Magic in African Technology: iron-smelting in Malawi', *Africa*, 58 (2).

MOSELEY, L.H., 1899. 'Regions of the Benue', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 14 (6).

POLE, L., 1983. 'A Ruhr or rural industry? The Scale of Iron Production in West Africa', unpublished paper given to the Museum Ethnographers' Group, London.

REHDER, J.E., 1986. 'Primitive furnaces and the development of metallurgy', *Journal of Historical Metallurgy*, 20 (e).

REIN-WUHRMANN, Anna, 1925. *Mein Bamumvolk im Grasland von Kamerun*, Stuttgart.

SASSOON, H., 1963. 'Early Sources of Iron in Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, XVIII.

----- 1964. 'Iron-smelting in the hill village of Sukur, North-eastern Nigeria', *Man*, 215.

TODD, J.A., and CHARLES, J.A., 1978. 'Ethiopian bloomery iron and the significance of inclusion analysis in iron studies', *Journal of Historical Metallurgy*, 12 (2)

VOLLBEHR, E., 1912. *Mit Pinsel und Palette durch Kamerun*, Leipzig.

WARNIER, J-P., 1985. *Echanges, developpement et hierarchies dans le Bamenda pre-colonial (Cameroun)*, Studien zur Kulturkunde No. 76, Stuttgart.

-----, 1986. 'Rapport preliminaire sur la metallurgie du groupe chap', (Atshaf), unpublished paper read to the Colloque sur l'archeologie du Cameroun, Yaounde (roneo).

WARNIER, J-P. and FOWLER, I., 1979. 'A Nineteenth Century Ruhr in Central Africa', *Africa*, 49 (4).

WARNIER, J-P. and ASOMBANG, R., 1982. 'Archaeological Research in the Bamenda Grassfields', *Nyame Akuma*, XXI.

WARNIER, J-P. and ROWLANDS, M., 1988. 'The magical production of iron in the Cameroon Grassfields', unpublished paper (roneo), SSRC Conference on African Material Culture, Bellagio.

ZACHARIAS, S.K., 1979. 'Analysis of iron-smelting remains from the Ndop Plain area of western Cameroon: preliminary report'. Unpublished report (roneo).

ZINTGRAFF, E., 1895. *Nord-Kamerun*, Berlin.

Tradztzonal Modes Of Cooperatzon Zn Nso': A Brief Description

Bongfen Chem-Langhee*

Introduction

The idea and practice of cooperation among individuals for the purpose of improving their economic and social wellbeing is an old one in Nso'. Historically, it has taken several forms which, although changed and transformed somewhat by colonial and post-colonial realities and institutions, remain viable in different degrees today, and can roughly be divided into two categories: the *nggwa'* (*njangi*) or rotating credit and savings drinking clubs and cooperative ventures involving the organization of communal labour for individual and group enterprises. The second category which involves the pooling of labour resources can itself be subdivided into two types: house-building, where a group of relatives, friends and neighbours combine their labour for the benefit of one person and are rewarded in form of entertainment with food and palm wine according to age, skill and the task performed; and fishing, hunting and farming, where groups of people combine their labour for the benefit of all concerned who share in varying degrees in the final product.²

These indigenous forms of cooperation provided the background of ideology and structure for modern modes of cooperation in Nso' and elsewhere in the Bamenda Grassfields and help to explain the relative ease and success with which modern modes of cooperation such as coffee, women's marketing, women's corn mill, handicraft and honey cooperatives and credit unions were introduced into the kingdom. The membership of some of these modes of production is overwhelmingly male, while that of

* This chapter is a revised version of the first part of an earlier article entitled, "Traditional and Modern Modes of Cooper, in Nso'," published in *proceedings/Contributions: Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon - Historical Perspectives*, pp. 283- eds. Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings (Leiden, The Netherlands: African Studies Centre, 1989). It is reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

others is exclusively female. But credit unions and handicraft cooperatives admit both sexes of all ages into their membership. What follows is a brief description of the traditional modes of cooperation in Nso', which have laid the groundwork for the smooth and successful introduction of modern modes of cooperation in the kingdom. The aim is not so much to show the link between the old and the new modes of cooperation in the kingdom. It is to preserve in writing, for the benefit of posterity, the nature and practice of Nso' traditional modes of cooperation, which have virtually died out with the exception of the *nggwa*' which is as strong today as it was in the past.

The *nggwa*'

The *nggwa*' (pl. *anggwa*') was and is still a rotating credit and savings drinking club in which members contribute money weekly, biweekly, or monthly and loan it on a rotating basis to one member who then applies it to solve his own financial problems. Need and the gravity of the problem are the criteria for granting the proceeds of a particular day. Members are usually but not always people of the same sex and of about the same age set adults, boys – brought together by a combination of common bonds – family ties, ethnic identity, neighbourliness, friendship, occupation. The sexual distinction which once characterized the *nggwa*' has persisted to a certain degree even in the urban areas despite the modern forces working against it.

Persons who cannot afford the monetary obligations of the *nggwa*' are nevertheless admitted into its membership, provided they can afford the entertainment aspect of it. In the past, the minimum amount of money to be contributed by each member was hardly ever firmly set. Nowadays, however, the minimum amount of contribution is set but the maximum is left to the good judgement of the contributors who take into account the receiver's capacity to refund the money when due. Today, as in the past, no interest is charged although the recipient has to provide the association with drinks on the day he receives the contributions. Most of these associations have recently also included food in the entertainment on the grounds that it reduces the alcoholic effects of the drinks. As in the past, the organization is based on mutual trust, cemented by the common bond, since there are no legal means by which defaulters can be compelled to honour their obligations.³

With the introduction of new demands during the colonial period, the *nggwa*' became, and is still today, one of the most important means whereby parents finance their children's educational needs. At the same time, there is a 'sinking fund' into which members deposit small sums of money during

every *nggwa*' session to enable them to pay their taxes when due. Three new funds have recently been introduced into the *nggwa*'. The first is the 'school fees

Fund into which members deposit small sums of money at rates convenient to them for use at the beginning of the school year to meet the school and college needs of their children. The second is known as the *kibam ke ngge*', literally "problem bag", a fund into which members contribute equal sums of money at each session of the *nggwa*', from which money is loaned or given out in grant to members who have financial difficulties. The last is the *wan kiser*, literally 'small contribution', an optional supplementary contribution with no fixed rate loaned to needy members at monthly interest rates of between twenty-five and fifty francs per 1,000 francs CFA. The main inducement to subscribe to this fund, when not compulsory, is the interest to be reaped by the contributor. Organized in this way, and with this ability to adapt to new circumstances, the *nggwa*' prepared the way for the later credit unions.

Cooperation in House-Building

Unlike the *nggwa*' which involves monetary transactions in cooperation, cooperation in house-building, virtually a thing of the past, was entirely labour-centred. Nso' houses were built of bamboo (raffia) poles, ropes, nails obtained from bamboos and sticks, creepers, thatch and mud, with a few support poles obtained from trees. Some of the operations involved in house-building required a large labour force which the majority of the people could not afford if that labour was to be paid for thus it necessitated cooperative labour.

The major operations involved in house-building included the preparation of the site and nails, the collection of bamboo and wooden poles and of thatching grass, the thatching of the roof, the prefabrication on the ground of the walls and roof and of the ceiling, the erection of the walls and of the roof on the ceiling, and the plastering of the walls and ceiling with mud. The preparation of the site and nails, the collection of poles and thatch, the construction of the walls and ceiling, and the thatching of the roof, all of which either represented the groundwork or did not require a large labour force, were usually carried out by the owner of the house with the help of a few family members and friends, who were rewarded with food and drink. The erection of the walls and roof and the plastering of the walls and ceiling required a large labour force and were carried out on separate days, sometimes with intervals of more than two weeks between the operations.

The first of the operations which required a large labour force was the erection of the walls on an oblong or square surface. Each of the four walls was lifted up from the ground and held upright in position by many people. Then a wooden pole was put in position at each of the four corners to connect the walls to each other. After that other persons, with the aid of ladders, tied the walls and poles together with ropes at the corners to end the operation. The entire group was then entertained with food, palm wine and corn beer. This was followed by the construction of the ceiling, which took several days to finish.

When the ceiling was constructed, a day was set aside for the erection of the roof. On the appointed day, the four triangular parts of the roof were lifted up from the ground, one by one, to the ceiling on which they were erected and fastened by means of ropes. As some persons continued to hold them in position, others climbed on them and forced them to join each other at the edges where they were tied together by means of ropes to complete the operation. The entire group was then rewarded with an entertainment of food, palm wine and corn beer. This was followed by the thatching of the roof by a technician who, like the designer of the walls, was rewarded at the end of the Job with a cock and a calabash of palm wine for his technical skill, in addition to entertainment with food and palm wine or corn beer which he received every day at the job site.

When the roof was thatched, a day was reserved for the plastering of the walls and ceiling. This was the most labour-consuming of all the operations. On the appointed day, elderly men chopped the grass before it was mixed with water and soil to produce mud. Younger men dug the soil, mixed it with the chopped grass and water, and trampled on it to produce the mud which they themselves used in plastering the walls and the ceiling. Boys and girls fetched the water that was used to produce mud and conveyed the mud from where it was prepared to the plasterers. The entire group was then rewarded with food, palm wine and corn beer, with men receiving larger shares than boys and girls. This lavish entertainment ended the process of house-building through cooperative labour in Nso’.

During the colonial period, cooperation in house-building began to wane and is comparatively rare to experience today. This was due largely to the changing modes of economic life, the influence of western ideas and values, and the introduction of modern house-building equipment, materials, skills and technology. For example, civil servants, teachers and other workers of the private sector were no longer available for cooperative labour. The extensive use of money for many transactions, the desire for modern houses, the acquisition of new skills such as carpentry and masonry, and occupational

specialization also undermined the idea of cooperation in house-building. Moreover, the introduction and use of sun-dried bricks, cement and cement blocks, plank and corrugated iron—in short, modern house-building equipment, materials and technology—made cooperation in house-building almost obsolete and turned the enterprise into an individual monetary affair. However, the spirit of cooperation remained to contribute to the development of modern modes of cooperation created during the same colonial period.

Cooperative Fishing Ventures

Unlike cooperation in house-building which was designed to benefit a single individual at anyone moment, cooperation in fishing was designed to benefit as many people as took part in the joint venture. At Ber, Liv and Mbo'nso' where there are some fishing grounds, villagers occasionally fished together. In the evening preceding such an occasion, they gathered leaves from a plant called *keorin* and pounded them into a pudding called *kor*, which stunned the fish but had no detrimental effects on the human beings who later ate the fish. Early in the morning of the fishing day, the *kor* was pooled and dumped into the fishing waters. When the fish was stunned and floated helplessly at the surface of the river or lake, whoever caught it kept it, with the result that some people went home with a better catch than others. Thus luck and skill were rewarded, as was the case with cooperation in hunting where luck, skill and contribution to the enterprise were all rewarded.

Cooperative Hunting Ventures

The organizers of the hunt and those who participated in it usually assembled at an appointed spot in the hunting grounds in the early hours of the day and decided on the strategy to be followed. Usually, the men, thought to be better shots and more agile stalkers, surrounded the hunting ground more or less in a zigzag manner at some intervals while the boys penetrated the hunting grounds to dislodge the game from its hideout. When satisfied that there were no longer any game in the vicinity, the hunters moved to the next hunting ground and repeated the operation. At the end of the day, the game was distributed in such a way that the men, believed to have played a more important part in the hunt than the boys, received slightly bigger and better portions. In addition to his general share, the first person to wound the animal, even if it did not die from that wound, received the choice part between the chest and the neck while the second person to wound or touch

it was rewarded with the tail. Although these cooperative hunting ventures, which survived colonialism, are rare today, they prepared the ground for the modern coffee cooperatives because they recognized skill and hard work.

Cooperation in Farming

Cooperation in farming was the most extensive labour-centred form of cooperation in Nso', perhaps because the Nso' were overwhelmingly subsistence farmers. It involved both men and women. With minor exceptions, farming operations in Nso' were characterized by a gendered division of labour. The women tilled the soil, harvested the crops and planted the seeds, although the men occasionally took part in the planting of the major staples guinea corn or sorghum, millet, maize. The men cleared new and fallowed farms from thick growth and trees and conveyed the harvest from the farms for storage at home.

Cooperation in farming followed this sexual distribution of labour. A woman with unusually large farms usually requested individual women to "give her a hand" - that is, help her till the soil, plant or sow the seeds, or harvest the crops. She was expected to return this "hand" to the individual concerned if and when the need arose but not necessarily for the same operation. For example, she could help in harvesting the crops whereas she had been helped in tilling the soil. Likewise, the men usually invited other men, on an individual basis, to help in clearing the farms or conveying the harvest from the farms to the homes for storage. They were also expected to return this help if and when the need arose. In both cases, the people so invited did not constitute a permanent group because they were invited as individuals and so dispersed after their host had entertained them with food and drink.

However, during the colonial period, some women tried to make these groups of individuals permanent. They formed farm associations whose members tilled one another's farms and harvested one another's crops. But because the members of the various associations did not have the same acreage under cultivation, dissatisfaction soon arose and led to the dissolution of many of these associations. In their place, some women formed permanent farm labour associations to provide paid labour to whomever desired it. Whether or not these permanent farm associations were dissolved or resurrected in another form, they paved the way and provided the background of ideology and structure for the modern modes of cooperation in corn mill, marketing, coffee and other enterprises.

Conclusion

As can be seen, cooperation among individuals for self-betterment, one of the most popular institutions among peasants in modern Cameroon, is an aged-old phenomenon among the Nso' peasants. In its traditional framework, it was simple in structure and operation, informal in organization and functioning, largely labour centred in approach, and geared towards social welfare. Once its aims, which were usually short-term or momentary, were achieved, the groups of individuals who had come together to achieve those aims dispersed. Conceived and organized in this way, traditional modes of cooperation in Nso' were free from the effects of mismanagement and exposure to modern forms of fraud and crookedness that have characterized some of the modern forms of cooperation, credit unions, women's and coffee cooperatives in particular, and were very limited in scope and objectives.

Within these limits, however, they paved the way and provided the background of ideology and structure for the modern modes of cooperation. The spirit of cooperation which they fostered remains the live wire of modern cooperation in Nso'. The common bond of ethnicity, culture and tradition upon which they were based, though now expanded to include religious affiliation, occupation, shared experiences, village and regional origin, provided the framework for the construction of modern cooperation among the Nso' both in the villages and in the urban centres. Traditional forms of cooperation are not thus as unprogressive as they might seem at first glance. Indeed, they and modern forms are sometimes continuous and complementary and, in the final analysis, serve, at least in this case of peasant production, the same ultimate objective, the maximization of social wellbeing and self-advancement.

Endnotes

1. I am grateful to Dr. Lovett Z. Elango, Dr. Felix Landze Maiamo and Dr Miriam Goheen who read an earlier draft of this paper and suggested ways by which it could be improved upon. But I am responsible for any shortcomings or errors of interpretation which still remain in it.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, the discussion that follows is based primarily on field work carried out in Nso' from 15-30 March 1987 in the

capital and its surrounding villages, 19-31 July 1987 in the capital and the farming villages located at the borders and 18-23 December 1987 in the capital.

3. Some Nso' people in the urban areas out of Nso' have recently tried to introduce a system of guarantees into some of the *anggwá*. First, the recipient gives a signed and undated cheque to each of his contributors and takes back this cheque each time he honours his obligation to his creditor. Since an unhonoured cheque is a serious offence involving the police and the courts in Cameroon, this is an effective deterrent to would-be defaulters. Where cheques are uncommon among the membership, a third party acts as a guarantor to the recipient and bears the burden in case of default. Sometimes, the two methods are combined.

References

Ardener, Shirley. "The Comparative Study of Rotating Credit Associations." *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 94:2(1964):201-29.

Ceesay-Marenah, Cocumba. "Women's Cooperative Thrift and Credit Societies." In *Women and Work in Africa*, pp. 289-95. Edited by Edna G. Bay. Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1982.

Chem-Langhee, Bongfen. "The Nso' Area Cooperative Union."

Annals of the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences, V:2, Social Sciences Series (July 1989):86-105.

-----, "Traditional and Modern Modes of Cooperation in Nso'." In *Proceedings/Contributions: Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon - Historical Perspectives*, pp. 283-301. Edited by Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings. Leiden, The Netherlands: African Studies Centre, 1989.

DeLancey, Mark. "Credit for the Common Man in Cameroon." *Journal of Modern African studies*, 15:2(1977):316-22.

-----, "Women's Cooperatives in Cameroon: The Cooperative Experiences of the Northwest and Southwest Provinces." *African studies Review*, 30:1(March 1987):1-18.

Kaberry, Phyllis. *Women of the Grassfields*. London: HMSO, 1952.

Ladipo, Patricia. "Developing Women's Cooperatives." *Journal of Development Studies* 17:3(1981):123-36.

Mahon, Dean. "A Short History of Cooperatives in the Northwest." In *Agricultural Marketing in the North-West Province*, pp. 415-32. Edited by John van D. Lewis. Yaounde: PN-AAK-864, USAID, 1980.

Mahon, Dean; and Tita, S.P.D. "The Nso Area Cooperative union Ltd. (N.A.C.U. Ltd.)." In *Study and Design Project of the Cooperative Sector: Thirteen Cooperative Case Studies*, pp. 35-62. Edited by Dean Mahon. Yaounde: USAID, 1979.

Matt, Lisa M. "A Report on Women's Cooperatives in the Northwest and Southwest Province." Yaounde: USAID, 1979.

-----, "Nso Women's Cooperative Shop Ltd." In *study and Design Project of the Cooperative sector: Thirteen Cooperative Case Studies*, pp. 63-73. Edited by Dean Mahon. Yaounde: USAID, 1979.

Obern, C.C.; and Jones, S.D. "critical Factors Affecting Agricultural Production cooperatives." *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economy* 52(1981):317-49.

O'Kelly, Elizabeth. *Aid and Self-help*. London: Charles Knight, 1973.

The Bafut And The Germans, 1889-1907

MATTHIAS L. NIBA

Introduction

The effective establishment of European colonial rule in Africa from the last quarter of the nineteenth to the first decade of the twentieth century took place in two phases. The first one was the scramble and partition of parts of the continent among the European countries having interests there. The second phase consisted of the actual establishment of colonial rule, that is, bringing the African peoples and their rulers under alien rule. While the scramble and partition phase can be said to have been achieved without armed conflict among the European colonizers themselves, force of arms, or the threat to use it occupied a prominent place in the actual establishment of colonial rule. Many instances of the use of force in the imposition of colonial rule can be found in various regions of the continent.¹

Parts of Africa which were under German colonial rule, particularly in Cameroon, were also affected by this syndrome. In his study of German imperialism in Cameroon, Rudin maintains that “fighting between whites and natives was a common occurrence during Germany’s rule,”² though that rule was hardly long enough (1884-1916) to permit the total conquest of the colony. Among those peoples who fiercely resisted the Germans were the Bafut of Northwestern Cameroon. These people fought with the Germans between 1891 and 1907. They ended up in defeat and their king (*Mfor* or *Fon*) was exiled for over one year.

The aim of this essay is to examine broadly the circumstances of the establishment of German colonial presence in the Cameroon hinterland particularly in the Bamenda highlands, how they came into contact with the Bafut, the reasons for the antipathy of the Bafut for the Germans and the resulting wars. Before doing this it is necessary to examine the geographical and historical background of the Bafut.

Background

Bafut (*Ala'a Bafu*) is a composite kingdom made up of semi-autonomous chiefdoms. Its capital, Bujong, is situated about 20 kilometres to the northwest of Bamenda, capital of the Northwest Province of Cameroon. It is bounded by the following kingdoms: to the north by Kom and Beba-Befang in the Menchum Division; to the west by Meta' in Momo Division; to the east by Babanki and Bambui and to the south by Ngkwen and Mankon all in Mezam Division. With an area of nearly 340km², Bafut had a population of slightly over 30,000 people in 1973.³ This population is made up of peoples of diverse ethnic backgrounds, settled in 3 geographical zones. There is the highland area (*ntare*), and the low area (*mbunti*) which falls abruptly into the Menchum River valley. At the centre is the capital area (*Mumala'a*, heart of the country) where the people are clustered round the *Fon's* palace. The people in this zone refer to themselves as the real Bafut, a name which is now applied to the whole kingdom.

Topographically, the area is part of the Bamenda plateau, which is a continuation of the western Cameroon highlands. But the Bamenda plateau forms a distinct geographical unit, rising to its highest point to about 3,000 meters. Bafutland itself occupies an elevated basin, rising to about 1,500 meters. This is surrounded by the Oshie Nggie range to the west and by the Oku and Kom mountains to the northeast. Like the rest of the highlands it enjoys a mild sub-tropical climate with mostly savanna vegetation interspersed in some places with forests.

Like most peoples of Cameroon before contact with Europeans, Bafut history was preserved in oral traditions, some of which were recorded by British administrators.⁴ According to them, the Bafut are among the people of the Bamenda highlands whose ruling dynasties claim an origin to the region of Ndobo or Tikari, situated in the northwest of Fumban in the present day western Province of Cameroon. Other dynasties who, today, claim the same place of origin are those of Kom, Nso', Bum, Fungom, Ndop and Ntem. Because of this Tikari claim, the people of these areas have been misnamed 'Tikars' in the administrative reports.

According to a common version a band of princes left Ndobo in a distant and unspecified past, driven from their home by internal dissension and desire for new lands. Moving west and southwestwards, one group moved into the Ndop plain in the present Ngoketungia Division (formerly Ndop Sub-division). Here the Bafut group is said by some to have separated and, after a roundabout route which took them through Kom and Wum, they eventually settled near the present site, among local peoples who

recognised their leader's superiority. They included those of the so-called Widekum stock.⁵

The expansion of their kingdom from its original nucleus to its size on the eve of colonial conquest can be traced in part to external factors, one of which seems to have been the incursion of the Bali Chamba into the Bamenda area at the beginning of the nineteenth century,⁶ which profoundly affected the balance of power in the area. It brought them into conflict with the bigger kingdoms and sent the smaller kingdoms seeking refuge in the bigger ones. After a clash with the raiders, Bafut became a rallying point for refugees from the south and southwest of the Nggemba area. Some eventually went back to their areas after the danger was over while others, such as the chiefdoms of Mambu and Mankanikong, stayed to become tributaries of Bafut of their own volition, without significantly affecting Bafut political organization.

Bafut political organization, which was first studied by Robert and Pat Ritzenthaler and then by Chilver and Kaberry,⁷ broadly fits into the first type of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's two tier classification of African political systems, that is, those having centralised authorities.⁸ But the two-tier classification has been shown to be inadequate in many respects for there are various gradations of centralisation, as Vansina, who has put forward five types of African kingdoms, has shown.⁹ Bafut would most probably fit into Vansina's third type, the incorporative kingdom. It was enlarged and consolidated under the impetus of an immigrant dynasty and its social and political situations have undergone changes in line with Warnier's view that social and political situations are constantly changing.¹⁰

At the head of the political structure is the *Fon*. Bafut fonship is vested in a single family or patrilineage. The *Fon* is both the political and religious head of the kingdom and his position is reinforced by the many taboos which hedge his personality. As is the case with the Yoruba *Oba* described by Lloyd,¹¹ the *Fon* never dies but is said to have gone away or to be missing. It is taboo to touch him. Only certain of his subjects who have gone through the prescribed initiation rite can speak to him directly and they do so through cupped hands and with bowed heads. The *Fon*'s name may not be called in public, for to do so is an insult. As with other monarchs elsewhere in Africa, he goes by certain praise names: he is *Mu* Nnangwe (the leopard's cub), *Ati* njong njong (a thorny tree), and *Nungubu* (a python) to name but a few. All justice is in his name and he is the final court of appeal and has the power of life and death over his subjects subject to modern constraints. As chief priest of the kingdom he offers sacrifices to his ancestors and intercedes with them for the welfare of the kingdom. The *Fon* is assisted by the Queen Mother,

(*Mamfo*), who is usually his biological mother or sister if the mother had died. Like any other queen mother, she advises the *Fon*. In addition there are two principal brother assistants to the *Fon*, namely the *Ndimfor* (*lit.* the elder brother) and *Muma* (*lit.* younger brother) who also act as advisers to him.

In his governance of the kingdom, the *Fon* is assisted by the all-pervading and powerful council of elders or *Kwifor*.

Literally *Kwifor* means holder or supporter of the *Fon*. It is an institution found in various forms in all the grassfields kingdoms. The members who must have reached the ranks of titled elders (*Bukum*, sing. *Nkum*) are hierarchically arranged in a rigorously maintained order. Movement up this hierarchy involves elaborate ceremonies which are accompanied by the payment of high fees and the provision of expensive feasts to members. At the head of this body is the *Tandakwifor* (father of the *kwifor* house). The most important political function of *Kwifor* is to act as a succession council, or “kingmakers”.

With regard to internal security, no other institutionalised body existed in the past outside *kwifor*. It was believed that the eyes of *kwifor* were everywhere. Moreover by their vigilance and concern for the maintenance of law and order many of the people themselves were part of the machinery of internal security. For external security Bafut had a militia. In this regard, Bafut can be grouped among those kingdoms which had a citizens’ army which was called up when it was needed.¹² Every able young man could be called up.

This was done through the state military organisation, *manjong*, which was headed by *Muma*. Each village had its own *manjong* group under its own leader who was supposed to lead his men to the *Fon*’s palace when required. For efficiency the army was divided into units or houses (*ndabumanjong*, houses of *manjong*), which went by different names, widespread in the region conceivably according to the way they saw their roles in the army. Thus there were houses with such names as *ndango-o* (house of stones), *ndamukong* (house of spears), and *ndankwa* (house of medicine). There were some specialised units, like the reconnaissance unit or scouts, *bugwe*, so named because they acted and behaved like clowns. All these were supported by older men who formed a group of reputed magicians.

The army was summoned in the past by the appropriate signal by use of a slit wooden drum (*kwini*), which was ensconced in a shed in the piazza of the palace. When the army assembled, it was briefed on its objectives. Each soldier provided his own arms, spears, clubs, cutlasses, bow and arrows. When guns became available around the middle of the nineteenth century, it became a mark of prestige to have one and people exerted every effort to get

them. With the availability of guns, the *Fon* supplied the gun powder. The Bafut went to war, not only to ward off attacks, but often to maintain their supremacy over their tributary subjects, in particular those to the north.· sometimes the wars resulted from raids and counter-raids for slaves, but at other times the Bafut attacked other people for alleged insults to their *Fon*. The rationale of different wars determined the different weapons, strategies and tactics used.

The first acts to be carried out at the start of all wars were the offering of sacrifices and the performance of purification rites at national shrines. These were royal graves (marked with stones), former palace sites (marked by trees), and pools where the spirits of the latest deceased *Fons* were believed to reside in transition to spiritland. Apotropaic rites such as 'locking' the roads leading out of Bafut with medicines to counter those of the enemy were also carried out. If the aim of a war was to ward off an attack, fortification works such as trenches were dug in strategic locations especially around the palace. Women, children and old men were evacuated to safe places in the forests and caves. Then the fighting force went out to engage the enemy. Instances of the Bafut having to ward off invasions before the German came seemed to have been few. But there is a reported instance of a Babanki invasion. A widespread tale concerning it treats of the exploit of a one-legged Bafut man who went by the nickname *Tebkule* (without a leg). Taking up position in a trench, he brought down many oncoming Babanki fighters with spears until the rest fled. with the exception of such instances, most Bafut wars recalled were offensive.

They could be triggered by many causes. It could be to bring to heel a recalcitrant vassal chief, who had defaulted in paying the customary tribute, or who had failed to surrender a royal animal, such as a leopard, bush cow, python, elephant, killed in his village, to the Fan. It might also be to avenge the death of a Bafut subject or to rescue one who was kidnapped. In some cases, the objective was to kill as many enemies as possible, or to destroy or loot any property and livestock. In other cases, it was to take as many captives as possible. There were also one day battles, frequently fought between Bafut and Mankon with clubs. Hostilities between the two neighbours could be brought about by frivolous causes, such as the kidnapping of a Bafut man or woman, trespassing into Bafut land or uttering what was considered an insult to the Fan and institutions of Bafut.

After a battle, people who had distinguished themselves by their bravery and by the booty and prisoners of war they brought home were adequately rewarded by the *Fan*. They were decorated with red feathers, or given some specially designed cloth. They also collected substantial parts of the booty

and were sometimes given wives by the Fan. It is behind this background that the Bafut encounters with the Germans must be understood.

The Coming of the Germans

There is no extant record of any direct European contact with the Bafut before the appearance of the German explorer, Dr Eugen Zintgraff, in April 1889 on his way to Adamawa.¹ Indirect contact with the coast of what is now Cameroon however started much earlier in the late fifteenth century with the arrival of the Portuguese at the northern coast. In July 1884, Germany outmaneuvered Britain to occupy the Cameroon coast after concluding a treaty of 'protection' with kings Bell and Akwa of Duala. Rudin who has studied, in detail, German colonialism in Cameroon has emphasized the role of economic factors in this move. According to him, Germany annexed Cameroon to protect her trade from both British and French competitors.¹⁴

After occupying the coastal region, it soon became necessary for the Germans to secure the hinterland, first to avoid being cut off by the British and the French and secondly to bypass the Duala middlemen and have direct access to the products of the interior such as palm oil and ivory. It was for this purpose that Zintgraff undertook his journey into the interior in 1888 with Adamawa as his destination. He reached Bali on the Bamenda highlands in January 1889 and was warmly welcomed by the Fan of Bali, Galega, whom he perceived as the leader of a people who appeared to him different in stature and bearing from their neighbours. This impression was reinforced when he learnt that the Bali migrated from the Adamawa area, the same place to which he was going; he was thus easily convinced by Galega to stay in Bali for three months.

Galega's flirtation with the German explorer has been rightly explained in diplomatic terms by Chilver and Kaberry.¹⁵ From the circumstances of their migration into the Bamenda area, the Bali king and his subjects were in the midst of rival kingdoms. It was therefore obvious that they had to welcome the Germans as allies to counter the threat of their neighbours. Through the Germans they would get firearms and other forms of assistance. The significance of the friendship between Galega and Zintgraff was not lost to the neighbours of Bali, particularly the kingdoms of Mankon and Bafut. These two sank their ancient differences and moved closer together. Thus when Zintgraff left Bali for the north through Mankon and Bafut, he was already suspect to the two kingdoms.

Reaching Bafut on 25 April 1889, he was received by the *Fon* of Bafut, Abumbi or Gwalem according to Zintgraff, with circumspection. His

decision to make a stopover in Bafut must have been guided by several factors. First of all, Bafut stood on the edge of the escarpment on the only route which led to the Menchum valley and to the north. Apart from the fact that the route went through Bafut territory, it also passed through small chiefdoms which paid tribute to Bafut. Zintgraff probably therefore needed Bafut guides to lead him through these areas. Secondly, Bafut was the last major kingdom before he reached Befang in the Wum area about fifty kilometres away. Above all, he hoped to conclude a Bali-style alliance with Bafut and peacefully win her over.

Zintgraff's initial behaviour on his arrival in Bafut did not however contribute to the establishment of cordial relations with the people because he committed two breaches of etiquette there. First, on meeting the *Fon*, whether by design or in error, he seized the royal drinking horn from the *Fon's* hand and drank out of it, a serious infraction of etiquette. Second, he addressed the king by his birth-name, Gwalem (Ngwalem), which was also forbidden. This open display of disrespect was interpreted in Bafut as a deliberate attempt to belittle the *Fon*. It was thought that the person behind Zintgraff's alleged plot was Galega of Bali. With relations thus strained, Zintgraff spent the next four days in Bafut in a somewhat tense atmosphere. He suspected every move of the Bafut in the belief that there was a plot to disrupt his journey. At last Zintgraff decided to leave Bafut without achieving much in terms of establishing friendship with the *Fon*.

The reason behind Bafut's icy reception of the first European went deeper than the breaches of etiquette. Serious though these were, they could have been forgiven. It also went deeper than the mere upsetting of the regional power balance. Deep in the subconscious of the king of Bafut was the fear that the world he had inherited from his ancestors would not survive the coming of the white man. Even though he could not imagine how much this world would be changed by the coming of the white man, with the benefit of hindsight, we can say that such a fear was not unfounded.

With that kind of initial contact, hostility was to govern Germano-Bafut relations for the greater part of German rule in Cameroon. More than most other peoples, the Bafut suffered under German rule because of the kind of reception they accorded to Zintgraff. He left Bafut with feelings of humiliation and demonstrated this by dismissing at the earliest opportunity the guides whom the *Fon* gave him. After a long march to Yola, Zintgraff returned to Bali in November 1889 without calling at Bafut which was not to see any German again for over a year.

On his return to Germany in 1890, Zintgraff presented a memorandum to the Colonial Bureau of the German Foreign Ministry, in which he argued

that the Bali lands (indeed the whole region) should be developed for German trade. He also considered the area suitable for recruiting soldiers as well as labourers for the plantations which were being established on the lower slopes of Mount Cameroon at this time.¹⁶ Zintgraff also believed that there was much ivory in the area which was finding its way to the Benue and Calabar and that none was reaching Duala. He also talked of the possibility of exploiting palm oil and wild rubber. He put forward a plan for administering the Bamenda area by bringing all the diverse ethnic groups under Galega as a way of reducing the cost of administration. The first step in the accomplishment of this programme was to establish a trading station in Bali.

Thus when Zintgraff returned to the region in 1891, he was at the head of a trading party. Accompanying him were agents of the German firm of Jantzen and Thormahlen. This was one of the firms which had been trading on the coast along with English firms since 1868.¹⁷ Zintgraff's mission was to maintain friendly relations with the chiefs of the area, to maintain peace and order in the hinterlands, to exert all efforts to open and secure caravan routes to the coast and to divert such trade as was going to British Calabar to Duala. One of the important trade items was ivory and it was thought that Bafut had a good supply of it. This conclusion must have been engendered by the fact that in Bafut as in most kingdoms of the area, ivory was a royal monopoly. Moreover, in Bafut, the king and the nobility openly displayed it in form of ivory armlets. Also when the king held court, it was customary for him to place his feet on a long tusk of ivory. In general, ivory played a great part in gift exchanges between Grassfields monarchs for goods of high value such as guns. But like any other goods of high value, it was not easy to stock in large quantities.

But under the impression that there were stockpiles in Bafut, Zintgraff sent emissaries to the *Fon* of Bafut to demand payment for goods given him on his previous visit and to inform him that a trade expedition was coming for ivory. The provocative behaviour of the 4 messengers, 2 Vais from Liberia and 2 Bali men, moved the Bafut to manhandle them and to kill the Vais. To avenge these killings meant war. But before resorting to war, Zintgraff demanded compensation of 10 ivories and 5 oxen from Bafut. It was when this request was turned down that he resorted to force. But the route to Bafut lay through Mankon which was friendly to Bafut and was thought to have instigated the murders as a means of forestalling any agreement between Zintgraff and Bafut, which would have been detrimental to her own position. So Zintgraff and Galega decided to subdue Mankon first. On 31 January 1891, a combined German and Bali force attacked

Mankon and burnt the town. But as the attackers retired, the Mankon who were now assisted by the Bafut, counter-attacked and inflicted heavy losses on their enemies. Four Germans, including their commander, Lieutenant von Spangenberg, were killed in the battle. By this defeat of the Germans and their Bali allies, the Bafut kingdom had a respite from harassment for another decade.

But the Germans and their allies were not idle during this period. Zintgraff soon afterwards concluded a formal treaty with Galega in August 1891.¹⁸ By this treaty, Galega formally surrendered his power over life and death and of making war to the Germans. In return he was recognized as the paramount ruler of nearby non-Bali peoples, among them Meta', Mogamo and eventually northern Bamileke. Galega was to collect taxes and tolls from the chiefdoms to be placed under him and give part to the Germans. The proportion was to be decided from time to time by the representative of the German government. This mutual aid treaty, because of the benefits it yielded to both sides, was the instrument which governed the relations between the Bali and the Germans till 1911, when policy began to change. It also constituted the cornerstone of early German administrative policy in the Bamenda area, which was to prop up friendly chiefs where they could be found by placing as many smaller ones as feasible under them as "vassals". By 1905, thirty-one alien towns in the region had been placed under Bali suzerainty.¹⁹ The *Fon* of Bali had become a major labour recruiter for the Germans. The military station often found itself obliged to intervene to maintain his position and from 1908 onwards was not slow in pointing this out to the Governor. However, Bafut was never part of the territories over which Bali had been declared paramount.

The German-Bafut Wars, 1901-7

Ten years after their first bloody encounter with the Bafut, the Germans came back, not as explorers and traders with half-hearted government support but as conquerors with the full backing of the Imperial German Government. This was manifested in the celebrated Pavel expedition which set out to establish the German presence in Adamawa and subdue recalcitrant peoples on its route, including the Bafut. From the German viewpoint, it was a punitive expedition aimed at punishing the Bafut for standing up to them. But from the Bafut viewpoint it was a full-scale war, the 'German War' (*ncho ba Jaman*). This discrepancy in perspective was understandable. From their lofty heights, the Germans were not fighting wars with 'natives'. War was far too dignifying to be fought between a

superior race and African 'natives'. Wars were fought between equals, who were at the same level of development. They were not fought between invaders armed with the Maxim gun and opponents armed only with clubs, flintlocks and spears. One needed diplomatic justification for a war. Punitive expeditions were already justified by their nomenclature. According to their proponents, punitive expeditions were usually carried out against "rebel tribes". But the 'rebellious natives' were really peoples defending their right to exist as independent nations. In the case of Bafut, German official records list three of these 'expeditions' against them, in 1901, 1904-5 and 1907.²⁰ But Bafut oral traditions mention four or more depending on the circumstances.²¹ Numbers at this point are not so important as the plain fact that between 1901 and 1907 a state of intermittent war existed between the German Reich and the Kingdom of Bafut.

The sending of this expedition showed that all was not well with the Germans in the hinterland. Apart from their Bali friends, it seemed clear that few other peoples in the interior of Cameroon wanted to have anything to do with them. As they must have realised from their experience with Mankon and Bafut ten years earlier, the only means for them to establish their authority over the people would be by force. Against this contingency they had armed the Bali in accordance with their mutual aid treaty.

According to Zimmerman's account and accounts in *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, the German Colonial Journal,²² the Pavel expedition reached Bali from Tinto in November 1901. The aim of the march against Bafut was to punish them for the aid they gave to Mankon ten years before. One detachment under Hans Glauning marched to Bafut after some fighting in Mankon. Another detachment under Pavel himself joined them. A joint attack was then mounted on Bafut. The Bafut resisted valiantly in spite of the German superiority in arms. According to Zimmerman, the Bafut resistance was helped by the use of breech-loaders, taken as booty from the Zintgraff expedition. But this only tells part of the story. The people were fighting for their very existence as a nation. After wreaking a lot of havoc on Bafut for two full weeks (9 to 25 December 1901) the Germans withdrew after burning the palace. The *Fon* had escaped. The result of this round of fighting, according to official estimates, was 1,062 casualties, 366 prisoners of war, and the supply of 300 labourers annually to the Germans by the Bafut.²³

To step up their surveillance on Bafut, the Germans established a military station in Bamenda in early 1902. The station still exists today in form of a military fortress built later.²⁴

Apart from its nearness to Mankon and Bafut, this station was of strategic importance, because of its location on top of a hill, overlooking the surrounding countryside which rendered any surprise attack difficult.

In the dry season of 1904-5 the Germans made another incursion into Bafut. It seems that their aim was to re-assert their authority in the area after the absence of a large part of the Bamenda military which had been sent to the Ossidinge District to quell a rising among the Anyang and others. Like its neighbour, Kom, it appears that Bafut took advantage of the absence of the garrison to either reject outright or delay meeting the demands for penal labour made on it in 1901. Needless to say the expedition caused as much havoc as the previous one. It is reported that the *Fon*, Abumbi, was forced to supply provisions, carriers and fifty labourers to the coastal plantations in February 1905.

The latest expedition did not satisfy the Germans and it looked as if another one was on the way. Nothing other than the complete subjugation of Bafut and the surrender of their king would satisfy the Germans. Another expedition was organised in the dry season of 1906-7 and this time the attack was more ferocious. This had been preceded in 1906 by further military action against some Meta' and Moghamo towns on the west and south-west of Bali respectively, which resulted in the forcible removal and settlement of some of them on sites close to Bali.

It appears that the Germans reckoned that their work of subjugation would be incomplete if the Bafut question was not settled once and for all. And it could only be settled if the *Fon* was captured because it was rightly thought that he was the centre of resistance of the Bafut. He had been eluding the Germans for long by either hiding in the hills or as tradition has it, going about *incognito* among the people. To force the *Fon* to surrender, according to one tale,²⁵ the Germans decided on a ploy. They started to arrest the Bafut *en masse* and brought them to the station in droves. They were thought to have a scheme to exile them to different kingdoms with the ultimate purpose of disorganising and even dismembering the Bafut kingdom itself. This proved too much for Abumbi who faced the grim prospect of being king without a kingdom, and so, the story goes, he went to the station and gave himself up. Taken prisoner he was sent to Duala where he was kept for over a year.

Oral traditions are rife with stories about the German-Bafut wars. Naturally none of our informants interviewed in the early 1980's was an eye-witness to any particular episode in the war. Rather what they gave were memories of what they had been told by their parents and we can detect how the sequence of events has been jumbled. Some families were scattered, as

women were captured and taken to Bali, and were never reunited with their families. There was hardship, hunger, deprivation and other forms of suffering usually associated with war.

We have some information from German sources closer to the events. According to the reminiscences of the missionary Adolph Vielhauer (1936, 45-59), the then head of the Basel Mission station at Bali, Ernst, had been instrumental in persuading the German station commander Glauning to visit Bafut without an armed escort and likewise persuading the Fon to meet him there, to come to terms. There followed a lull in hostilities. But they were resumed by the station early in 1907, when the palace quarter was set in flames and the Fon taken and exiled for over a year. We turn now to the half-yearly report, 1st April to 30th September, addressed by Glauning's successor, Hauptmann Menzel, to the Imperial Government at Buea on 26 September 1909: "The reinstatement of Chief Bumbi (sic) had, in the past, been strongly recommended by the station and this measure must now, despite the renewed unpleasantness, be acknowledged as having been correct. Due to his prestige Chief Bumbi alone was in a position to bring order into the Bafut domain, which was falling apart during the period of his exile. His personality will have to be accepted."

The fall of the Bafut kingdom resulted from the superior fire-power of their opponents. But what also contributed to the German success was the fact that the various kingdoms of the region could not unite against them. The neighbouring kingdom of Mankon was reported to have reached an accommodation with the Germans and so rendered no assistance to Bafut despite the fact that Bafut assisted her in 1891. In reports on the 1901 'expedition' the Germans claimed that Bikom, Bambili, Mejung and Bambui had expressed gratitude for deliverance from Bafut raids and exactions.²⁶ True or not, the German government, like those of other European powers elsewhere in Africa, needed a moral justification for its intervention, sometimes to quieten its internal critics.

Maintaining their hold over the Bafut after their defeat seemed to have posed no serious problems for the Germans. In terms of logistics Bafut was just a stone's throw, roughly twenty kilometres, from the Bamenda station. Administratively this station was classified as a military station²⁷, implying that the very large region then under its jurisdiction was regarded as incompletely explored and "pacified" area. Patrols were sent out, when available, on the slightest provocation. The Bamenda station was to remain a military one for the duration of German rule in Cameroon. Its garrison was kept busy in military operations for much of the time, penetrating new territories and quelling uprisings in areas which had supposedly been

‘pacified’. Having endured the ravages of a long war with the Germans, coupled with the exile of the Fon, the Bafut were definitely tired and had to submit to the dictates of their new overlords. They carried out obligations such as paying taxes, and supplying labour for government projects just “to buy their heads”.²⁸

This humiliating situation was slightly cushioned by the manner in which the people were treated after their defeat. The kingdom was left intact as it was before the conquest, and was not put under the suzerainty of another king as was the case of the Meta’ towns put under Bali control. Nor was any other kingdom placed under it. By recognising the Bafut kingdom as it was, the Germans had implicitly recognised the precolonial paramountcy which had been established by conquest. Restoring the *status quo* was, however, not dictated by magnanimity but by self-interest on the part of the Germans: in the view of the Bamenda station commander, quoted above, orderly government in Bafut was impossible without its king.²⁹ It meant that the authorities recognised the role of the *Fon* as a convenient agent of administration. All the same, the people still had to pay the price for the restoration of their *Fon* and the retention of the kingdom intact. They had to be obedient to the station, and fulfill all their obligations. Any default would have been met by armed intervention. There is no evidence of such interventions after 1907.

Conclusion

We have examined the imposition of German colonial rule on the Bafut against the background of the indigenous history and political system. The system which was not static seemed to be visibly centred on the *Fon* as the source of the political, economic and religious life of the people. But the *Fon* was merely the tip of the iceberg in a complex social and political organisation in which the princes, *Kwifor*, chiefs and lineage heads were involved, which ensured cohesion and relative stability in the system.

The prolonged resistance of Bafut to the German incursion can be attributed to the fact that the people rallied round their *Fon*. As long as the *Fon* eluded arrest, the people were prepared to continue the fight. This is because the *Fon*, by virtue of his office, was the very symbol of their survival as a people. As elsewhere in Africa, they succumbed to superior military force. But it was only after the *Fon* was exiled that the struggle ended. No organised resistance like the mystical Ekumeku Movement on the west bank of the Niger in Nigeria³⁰ emerged in Bafut. At that time the people were realistic enough to realise that the white man’s technology was superior and

that any further struggle against it would have been suicidal. The German wars were traumatic. They created a lasting impression on the people's minds; so indelible is the imprint that they have been integrated into Bafut folklore.

Endnotes

1. Some of them are treated in: J.C. Anene, "The Protectorate Government of Southern Nigeria and the Aros 1900-1902," *Journal of the Historical society of Nigeria (JHSN)* 1:1(1956), pp.20-27; Michael Crowder, ed., *West African Resistance* (London: Hutchinson, 1971); A.E. Afigbo, "The Aro Expedition of 1901-1903" *Odu*, New Series, 7 (April 1972) pp.3-25; Obaro Ikeme, "Colonial conquest and Resistance in Southern Nigeria," *JHSN* 6:3(1972); pp.251-270.

2. Harry R. Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons, 1884-1914: A Case study in Modern Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), p.307.

3. Emmanuel Ngwa Nebasina, "The Bafut Chieftdom: A Study in Rural Geography" (Diplome d'Etudes Superieure Thesis, University of Yaounde, 1973), p.4.

4. For details of what the British administrators recorded, see E.G. Hawkesworth, "Assessment Report (hereafter called "Bafut Assessment Report."), Ab3 National Archives, Buea.

5. Widekum is a label which the British used for some of the varied peoples in present day Momo, parts of Menchum and Mezam Divisions, who claimed the Widekum area on the edge of the escarpment stepping down to the Cross River Valley as the legendary place of their origin. Their political system was perceived as being segmentary, or weakly centralised.

6. For aspects of the history of Bali Chamba see M.D.W. Jeffreys, "Traditional Sources Prior to 1890 for the Grassfield Bali of Northwest Cameroon," *Afrika und Uebersee* 46:3(1962), pp.168-199 and 46:4(1962), pp.290-313; E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, "Chronology of the Bamenda Grassfields" *Journal of African History (JAB)* 11:2 (1970), p.252, and more

recently Richard Fardon, *Raiders and Refugees*, (Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1988), pp.85-9.

7. Robert Ritzenthaler and Pat Ritzenthaler, *Cameroons Village*:

An Ethnography of the Bafut (Milwaukee: Public Museum, 1962) pp.112-113; E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, "Traditional Government in Bafut, West Cameroon," *The Nigerian Field* 28:1 (1963) pp.3-30. Latterly Bafut popular traditions have been analysed in terms of structural history by Ronald K. Engard, "Myth and Political Economy in Bafut", *Paideuma*, 34, 1988.

8. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, eds, *African Political Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.1.

9. Jan Vansina, "Comparison of African Kingdoms", *Africa* 32 (1962) p.33. The five types are Despotic Kingdoms, Royal Kingdoms, Incorporative Kingdoms, Aristocratic Kingdoms and Federations.

10. Jean-Pierre Warnier, "Pre-Colonial Mankon: The Development of a Cameroon Chiefdom in its Regional Setting," (Ph.D Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1975), p.444ff.

11. P.C. Lloyd, 'sacred Kingship and Government among the Yoruba,' *Africa*, 30:3, (1960), pp.221-231.

12. Citizen armies are discussed in Lucy Mair, *African Kingdoms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p.66.

13. The account of this journey is recorded by the explorer himself in *Nord Kamerun* by Eugen Zintgraff, published in Berlin in 1895. Relevant sections of the book relating to Bamenda have been translated by Mrs. E.M. Chilver and edited by E.W. Ardener in *Zintgraff's Exploration in Bamenda, Adamawa and the Benue Lands.1889-1892* (Buea: Government Printer 1966).

14. Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons*, p.33.

15. Chilver and Kaberry, "Traditional Government in Bafut," p.7.

16. For details about the German plantations, see Edwin Ardener, Shirley Ardener and W.A. Warmington, *Plantation and Village in the Cameroons* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

17. Shirley Ardener, *Eye-Witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon 1883-1887* (Buea: Government. Printer, 1968), p.24.

18. Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda*, pp.30-31.

19. For the list of towns see the appendix to the Bali Assessment Report in W.E. Hunt, Assessment report of the Bali Clan, Bamenda Division 1925, Ab5 National Archives, Buea.

20. We are indebted to Mrs. E.M. Chilver for her translation of most of the source material of German activities in Bamenda embodied in her article, "Paramountcy and Protection in the Cameroons: The Bali and the Germans, 1889-1913" in *Britain and Germany in Africa*, eds., Prosser Gifford and W.M. Roger Louis (New Haven and London: Yale University press 1967). pp.479-511. In particular there is also her translation of the relevant sections on the 1901 German-Bafut war found in Oscar Zimmerman, *Durch Busch und steppe* (Berlin: 1909) p.168ff.

21. Most of our informants speak of more than three episodes. It is understandable because the third expedition appeared to have been a prolonged one with the Germans going and coming back.

22. Sections of *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* relating to Bamenda have been translated and edited by Nkwi in Paul Nchoji Nkwi, *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891-1913: A German Colonial Account* (Leiden: The Netherlands, 1989).

23. German official figures by Arnold Ruger in *Kamerun unter Deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* 1960, quoted in Chilver and Kaberry "Traditional Government in Bafut," p.7.

24. E.W. Ardener, *Notes on the Scheduled Monuments of west Cameroon* (Buea: Government Printer: 1965) p.7.

25. Interviews with Joshua Ayonghe (d.1982) and Martin Nimang (d.1988), Bafut, 27 May 1980.

26. Entries in *Kolonialblatt*, 13 (1902) translated and quoted in P.M. Kaberry and E.M. Chilver, *Field Notes 1946-1963* (MSS) p.338. Also in Nkwi, *German Presence*. p.42.

27. *Colonial Office, Reports on Various Matters Relating to the Cameroons*, Ba/1916/3, National Archives Buea.

28. This expression literally translated from Bafut means, 'save one's neck'. Interview with Prince Muma Muta, Bafut, 2 April 1981.

29. Chilver and Kaberry, "Traditional Government in Bafut," pp.7-8.

30. For more on the Ekumeku Movement see Philip A. Igbafe, "Western Igbo Society and its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement 1898-1911". *JAH* 12: 3 (1971): 441-459.

References

Ardener, E.W. *Notes on the Scheduled Monuments of west Cameroon*.
Buea: Government Printer, 1965.

Ardener, Shirley. *Eye-witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon 1883-1887*.
Buea: Government Printer, 1968.

Chilver, Elizabeth M. "Paramountcy and Protection in the Cameroons:"
The Bali and the Germans 1889-1913." In- *Britain and Germany in Africa*,
pp.479-511. Edited by Prosser Gifford and Wm Roger Louis. New Haven
and London: Yale University Press, 1967.

Chilver, E.M. tr., and Ardener E.W. ed., *Zintgraff's Exploration in Bamenda, Adamawa and Benue Lands*. Buea: Government Printer, 1966.

Chilver, E.M. and Kaberry, P.M. "Traditional Government in Bafut."
Nigerian Field, 28:1(1963): 4-30.

Engard, R.K. "Myth and Political Economy in Bafut (Cameroon)",
Paideuma, 34, 1988, pp. 51-89.

Fardon, R. *Raiders and Refugees*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1988, pp.85-9.

Mair, Lucy, *African Kingdoms*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. Nkwi, Paul Nchoji. *The German. Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891-1913*. Leiden, The Netherlands: African Studies Centre, 1989.

Nebasina, Emmanuel Ngwa. "The Bafut Chiefdom: A Study in Rural Geography." Diplome d'Etudes Superieure Thesis, University of Yaounde, 1973.

Ritzenthaler, Robert and Ritzenthaler, Pat. *Cameroons Village: An Ethnography of the Bafut*. Milwaukee: Public Museum, 1962.

Rudin, Harry R. *Germans in the Cameroons*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938.

Vansina, Jan. "Comparison of African Kingdoms." *Africa*, 32 (1962): 324-334.

Vielhauer, D.A. "Aus den Anfangen der Graslandmission", in E. Kellerhals (ed.) *Ich will sie mehren und nicht mindern:*

Fünfzig Jahre Basler Mission in Kamerun: Stuttgart und Basel, 1936, pp. 45-59.

Warnier, Jean-Pierre, "Pre-Colonial Mankon: The Development of a Cameroon Chiefdom in its Regional Setting." Ph.D Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1975.

Zimmerman, Oscar, *Durch Busch und steppe*, Berlin, 1909.

**Nso' And The Germans:
The First Encounters In Contemporary
Documents And In Oral Tradition**

V.G. FANSO AND E.M. CHILVER

In 1958, 1960 and 1963 the late Dr Kaberry, accompanied for some time by Mrs Chilver, collected some information from elderly men, who had been witnesses of the events concerning the first encounters between Nso' and the Germans. Her notes are deposited at the British Library of Political and Economic Science and we have made use of them. Among her principal informants were late Faay (lord) Taangkum Kuy (Sife),* the late Faay Faanjang,* the late Faay Koonggir (Kimfoy),* and the late Faay Tsenngkar;* a number of other elderly men were able to supply corroborative evidence on certain points. We have also made use of the interviews and conversations Dr Fanso held in 1975, 1976, 1977 and at other times with eye-witnesses and people who had first hand or good-hearsay information of the early hostilities with the Germans. Among these were the late Faay nggoorin of Mbiame,* the late Faay Tsenkay of Kimbo',* the late Paa Peter Sa'ngguv of Ndzeendzev wo Ku'un,* the late Yaa woo Faa* who was taken away by the Germans after the 1906 encounter, the late Paa Felix Javnyuy Tah of Kikaykela'ki,* and the late Paa Paulinus Lukong of Ngkar.* Copies of some of Dr Fanso's tapes (in Lamnso') are to be found in the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University, Bloomington. On the German side we have some contemporary reports, published in the official *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (henceforward DKB) in the main, and the report on the burning of the palace in June 1902 located in the National Archives Yaounde.

The principal informants we have named were agreed that there were three important visits by European-led groups to Kimbo' itself before the 'big German war', the punitive expedition of April-June 1906. Other European-led visitors probably passed through Nso', but either did not reach Kimbo' and the palace or left no impression.

* Asterisks refer to the Appendix (Informants) and Glossary.

The first encounter, recalled as involving about eight to ten European officers is indubitably to be identified with the arrival, in mid-January 1902, of the expeditionary force of Lt Col von Pavel, fresh from its victory over Bafut and Mankon in late December 1901, and on its way to Banyo to bring assistance to Lt Nolte. Von Pavel's published report says little. His Armourer Sergeant-Major-Oskar Zimmermann, who published his memoirs, is fuller (1909, 176/7).

The expedition, he says, marched from Babungo, where it was well supplied with food and carriers, on January 12 and camped at 'Esob', the modern Tabessob or Sov, described as a large farming village. Here the gift of a ram from *Fon* Nso' was received. On January 14 the expedition camped in an upland valley he calls 'Essu', an unidentified place between Sov and Meliim, rich in farm settlements and surrounded by cultivated lands. A long march brought them to 'Kimbo', the capital, where an abundance of provisions awaited them. Zimmermann remarks that the houses were especially well-constructed, like those of Bali, but larger. Nearly all the men he saw, he recorded, wore gowns which he thought were bought from the Hausa. The district was rich in stock. The inhabitants had never seen Europeans before but were confident in their bearing, unlike the timid forest people. Zimmermann puts this confidence down to contact with the Hausa, then credited with the spread of cloth and civility. After two days' rest in Kimbo', when some sick Bali carriers were sent home, the expedition marched north along good routes noting the stock (the German term does not distinguish between goats, sheep and dwarf cattle) browsing on the hillsides. The expedition reached 'Baschungele' (Nsungli, the Nso' term for the Wimbum) and camped in a small hamlet before turning east. He remarks on the chilly nights of Nso', well-endured by the Grassfields carriers recruited in Bali and Babungo, but a misery to those recruited in Yaounde.

How was this first visit remembered? We learn from oral tradition that the expedition came during the dry season (which lasts from October to March); that the *Fon* went across the Bui torrent for a short distance to the hamlet of Meliim to meet the visitors, referred to as *vijin* or 'bridal party', not because of its modest demeanor but because its arrival required conspicuous, Obligatory and depleting expenditure. As much can be read between the lines of von Pavel's laconic entry: 'January 15 ... the expedition passed through Bansso country, camping at Kumbo. The chief of this large and well-built settlement gave it a friendly reception and was prepared to fulfil demands punctually.' (DKB v.13, 238).

Faay Koonggir told Chilver and Kaberry in August 1960 that the expedition was not unexpected. 'Word had come from Babungo that people

would be well-advised to hide guns, spears and cutlasses and that it would be unwise to fight the Germans. So the *Fon* had this announced in the market. When Nso' saw the Germans for the first time a *yong ji anyuy* (they called them spirit-beings). The Germans stayed in the Gham *lav njong* (warrior lodge) for two days. Everyone came to look at them. The Germans did not make presents: they treated the Nso' like monkeys. Then they went to Banyo.' Faay Tsenkay told Fanso in April 1977 that there were repeated market announcements (*kinsa'way**) and announcements in warrior lodges and club houses (*lav se njong* and *lav se vinyo**) that the Germans were coming to greet the *Fon* and that people would be able to see them in the palace.

The Reverend Father Johannes Emonts, in his dramatic rendering of Peter Wamey's life² (1927, 29-32) gives an account from this Babungo informant of the debate which preceded the German arrival in Babungo in which their *Fon's* advice to welcome the expedition was finally taken, and the tradition of the warning message to *Fon* Nso' is also to be found there.

According to oral tradition when the Germans finally arrived they were many, about ten Europeans, and they were accompanied by a countless number of black people who were armed and carrying loads. An unnamed old man of Kisha' (probably in Kikoo) near Kikaykela'ki, told M.D.W. Jeffreys, a senior British administrative officer and ethnographer, (Banso Tribal Notes, MSS, n.d.? 1937-42) that all the elderly people went to Kimbo' with presents of fowls, fresh eggs and corn-flour to welcome them. Fay Tsenkay told Fanso that the Germans saw the skull-trophies of Nso' war enemies hanging on the rails of the frontages of the *manjong* (warrior lodge) houses, did not like it, and said that the Nso' were cannibals. People feared that this might be an excuse for them to start trouble. The Faay was convinced that the skull-trophies were probably one of the reasons for later German hostilities against Nso'. This is clearly a later rationalisation: the DKB report of 1906 does indeed mention that some nine hundred skull-trophies were observed, and we can presume attention was paid to them in a manner which might well have given rise, after 1906, to speculation. But the report does not, of course, carry any accusations of cannibalism against the Nso': the German officers had long known from Zintgraff's and other reports of the custom of head-taking in war. (The Grassfields people punished for cannibalism by the Germans, on the say-so of their neighbours, were the Nggie, though remoter groups tended to be accused of it.) In any event, the Nso' skull-trophies, according to oral information, were apparently removed, at German demand, at some period after 1906 and, according to report, piled in a cave overlooking the Roo Kimbo' stream on the hill called Taayav.

A curious anecdote was recounted by Sheey woo Kiron, a prince (*wan nto**) and former officer of the royals' society (Sheey nggiri*). At the time of the *vijin* he was a toddler, and remembered nothing of them. But when he was old enough to leave his mother to sleep with other young boys in one of the palace dormitories his elder half-brother Mbinglo, later *Fon* Sem III, was not sleeping in the palace. The passing Germans had taken a fancy to the lad and had asked for him. The *Fon* Sem II, it is said, sent him to Sov to be hidden and mollified the Germans with the gift of two tusks of ivory. The lad did not return to the environs of Kimbo' for some time.

Nso' people generally marvelled at but were not at all attracted by this very first group of Europeans to come to their country; their impressions were to be confirmed by subsequent visiting groups. These Germans were generally remembered as grim and unfriendly people who were difficult to please and who looked down upon Nso' people 'as monkeys'. What first struck people about them, it is said, was their apparently soft skin, their boldness, their hairiness, their boots, their long noses, and the way they seemed to talk through their nostrils. The aged queen-mother Yaa woo Faa and later, Faay Tsenkay and Paa Felix Javnyuy Tah recalled the black men who translated for the Germans during this and subsequent visits. Faay Tsenkay (then a young page) could recall the interpreter who translated what the Germans said to the *Fon* and vice-versa, and wondered if anyone really understood a word of what they were saying, during this very first encounter. We wonder who this first interpreter could have been: a *Lamnso*'-speaking slave recruited at the coast who spoke pidgin, which the Germans also acquired (like the man Muyenga picked up by Zintgraff who was Munggaka-speaking)? Or was he a Grassfielder perhaps from Bali-Nyonga, longer in touch with Europeans than other chiefdoms? There was, for example the well-known retainer of Bali-Nyonga nicknamed Karasi (kerosene) who had very probably learned pidgin, as other Bali had, from Zintgraff's Vai and Lagosian carriers and who was an envoy and go-between who specialised in dealing with Nso' for the Bali king Fonyonga. The Bali-Nyonga supplied much of the early interpretation, as Moisel's maps bear witness: the toponymy of the Western Grassfields is Bali. Our informants gave no names and did not comment on how well or badly this person spoke *Lamnso*', if that was the language solely used. Many Grassfielders spoke more than one local language, and we hear of interpretations using a string of three.

Hard on the heels of von Pavel came an expedition, via the nearby chiefdom of Baba', led by the hardened traveller captain Hans von Ramsay and the trader Habisch, exploring on behalf of the GNWK, the monopolistic produce buying concession company. This had assembled in Bamenda in

January and reached Banyo on 18 May 1902.³ We have no exact dates for its passage. Ramsay's short report (DKB. V.13, 607) briefly describes Nso' as prosperous and densely populated and mentions no incidents. In a later, reminiscent, publication (1925) he describes 'King Bansso' as a very stout man of around 45, of medium height, and 'suffering severely from gout', a description which accords perfectly with that of his daughter Yaa woo Faa. The palace, recently struck by lightning and burnt down, was a 'very prettily situated, completely rebuilt village'. Ramsay said the *Fon* received him at the entry to the forecourt (*maandze nggay*) and led him to the inner court (*taakibu*) where 'the big men of the kingdom gathered round the chief'. Almost at once a great distribution of quantities of palm wine of dimensions Ramsay 'had never before seen' began. He had the impression, obviously a misconception similar to Zintgraff's about Bafut, of the aim of the *Fon*'s regal hospitality, believing that 'the good king, on the first day and the following rest-day', was deliberately trying to intoxicate him. When the *Fon* retired 'from the contest and withdrew', his 'ministers' who drank out of cupped hands 'carried on our rounds of drinking, but only to forward the strengthening of our friendship'. Both the *Fon* and the people, he noted, were impressed by his big-horned gramophone which his 'loyal expedition manager Habisch imperturbably started up', clearly expected to give the same effect of wizardry as Zintgraff's famous harmonium. During his stay in Banyo he occupied the same quarters which, a few weeks earlier, had been occupied by Lt Col Pavel on his march to Lake Chad. This information helps to establish the date of his arrival in Nso' as not later than mid-April 1902, if not earlier, during the dry season.

It seems not unlikely that the passage of the Ramsay expedition from Bamenda onwards was quite leisurely since its object was to see what natural resources could be exploited. (The GNWK eventually set up a sub-agency in Kimbo', largely concerned with the cattle trade.) According to Kaberry's informant, Paa Taakong Ndzema'a, a very old man of Faay Menjey's family, they seemed 'more like soldiers than traders': the expedition was certainly well-armed as reports of its subsequent travels make clear. They are said to have warned the *Fon* and others against 'bad people' likely to come after them – whether this is a genuine memory or *post-hoc* prophecy is hard to say – and they took with them as a guide one Sheey Mbu', a former secret society officer (*sheey ngwerong**). This man was severely beaten (by whom, is unclear) and left for dead at Ntem*, from whence he was able to send a message asking for people to be sent to carry him home.

Our informants were agreed that the second expedition came during the same October to March dry season as the first, that there were only two or

three Europeans in the expedition but that they were accompanied by a large body of armed carriers. They too were deemed hostile. They hit a Nso' man, some say a lineage head (taala' *wir Nso**) with the butt of a gun and he bled profusely. Possibly this act of hostility, obviously incompatible with the successfully friendly visit described by von Ramsay with condescending merriment, was carried out by one of the armed carriers without the knowledge of Ramsay and Habisch. It is also not clear from oral tradition whether it was the Ramsay expedition which passed close by Oku, or Glauning's (1905) which entered the area of Oku, which met the Mbiame chief and urged this *Fon* and his people to return to their village. (The Mbiame had earlier abandoned their village as a result of frequent Bamum and Banyo raids, moving from site to site, until they were harboured in Oku. They eventually returned to Nso' in the reign of Mapiri, 1907-1910.) The leader of the expedition is nicknamed Kambilam in Mbiame and in some versions of Nso' oral tradition.

These two travellers are sharply distinguished from the next two, German military men with a considerable number of armed soldiers, who are nicknamed the bara' *ton nto*' (foreign palace burners) and are said to have 'started a small war'. They were Lt Houben and an NCO (Unteroffizier), stamm.

We learn from Houben's report (FA 1/112, 34-35) that the expedition, en route to Banyo, arrived in Kumbo on 3 June, 1902, and found the town 'deserted by most menfolk and all women and children. The chief, feared on all sides, made an unfavourable impression on me. The victuals ordered two days earlier were not ready despite the prosperity of the whole neighbourhood and were, on request, only supplied in small quantities'. He then pitched camp in the 'large chief's compound'. In the evening, he continues, the *Fan* escaped 'after I had repeatedly communicated my peaceable intentions'. The following day, 4 June, between noon and one o'clock, 'the Bansos unexpectedly attacked me with a force of about 1200 men and surrounded the chief's compound. Warned by the sentries I rapidly collected my people, left 9 men to guard the camp and ordered the attack. I myself went with 16 men against the centre, the white NCO stamm with 10 men against the left, and the coloured NCO "Monrovia" with 10 men against the enemy right wing. After a short engagement the troop went on to attack the enemy by storm'. Houben claims that the enemy 'tried to occupy the surrounding compounds several times but was driven away again and finally fled in different directions. At about 5 o'clock I assembled my people, burnt down the palace, and moved camp to a hill 1 km south of Kumbo. The ivory stored in the chief's compound was buried, since it was impossible to take

with us and will be brought to Bamenda station by Unteroffizier stamm on his return'.

Houben's report states that during the fight on 4 June, 'the enemy lost about 50 dead' and two prisoners were taken. The German casualties were two: one severely and one lightly wounded. 'According to the mutually-supporting statements of the prisoners,' his report continues, 'the chief of Kumbo, when he came to know of my coming, had agreed on the surprise attack with his sub-chiefs'. Unable to continue their onward march to Banyo because of 'the severe wounds' of one of his soldiers 'who was not able to be moved', Houben seized the opportunity and was 'determined to capture the chief in the night of 6-7 June'. The Fon had fled to what Houben calls 'Etyang'. 'After a seven-hour march [no compass points stated] I reached the objective at daybreak, found slight opposition in the village, which' cost the village the loss of five men but the chief sought for had vanished.' On the afternoon of 7 June, the Bansos trying to show how strong they felt themselves to be, made 'a further attack on our camp', using 'several hundred men', but the attack was again repelled. 'The enemy's losses could not be counted because of gathering darkness.' Houben and his troops marched away on 8 June. 'Shortly before leaving the territory of the Bansos,' the report concludes, 'one of the prisoners, who had already twice deliberately wrongly guided the expedition, refused to go further with it. He was shot.' On 17 June Houben reached the Banyo station.

Dr Jeffreys, (Bamenda MSS, n.d.? 1937-42) obtained a first hearsay mention of the Houben expedition from Sheey woo Do' at Kam village, later amplified by Dr Kaberry's informants, now including the *Fon*. Here is the order of events viewed from the Nso' side. The German force, estimated by some informants to be of forty or more soldiers, accompanied by Bali and Babungo carriers, arrives at Bambuy on the other side of the small Buy river, unexpectedly during the night of 2-3 June, hurriedly camps, and then marches up to the palace without carriers--that is in military readiness--before dawn on a *ntangrin**, a sacrificial and secret society meeting day, arriving in the *maandze nggay* (forecourt) where they later pitch tents. The *Fon* is, according to his son the late *Fon* Sem III, considering the problem, with his entourage, of finding them food and quarters when they suddenly appear before the palace. Houben comes in and makes his demand for victuals and continues to nag at the *Fon* all morning. Not enough can be had immediately. The *Fon*, alarmed by the tone of the proceedings and by the soldiery, slips away. No more food then comes. The unruly soldiers forthwith occupy the palace and set about ransacking the stores. Houben posts men to prevent the prior removal of items. Kerem, head of the King's pages (*taamfon* or *nsheelav*

*faay**) and another retainer, whose name was not recalled, are sent by the *Fon*, exactly when is unclear, to remove stored guns. They are detected by the guards, set upon and tied up. *Taamfon* is tortured by being set close to a fire so that the soles of his feet are burnt off. His screams for help can be heard at a distance: he later dies of his burns. Another man, who slaps a soldier's face, is allegedly instantly shot with a revolver by a European. Meanwhile the *Fon* has escaped to Faay Koonggir's, a good viewpoint, whither he summons Kwangha, then Faay Taawong, his priestly deputy, and founder of Taangkum Kuy's line. From there they go to the compounds of various notables, first to Tsenngkar's, later to Ndze Do's, then to Mbo'tong, and finally to Faay ngkim's at Meluv.

Our oral sources mention no organised or premeditated attack by the Nso' on the German troops in the palace and at Bambuy, though a 'small war' is how the event of June 1902 is generally described. Yaa woo Faa in conversation with Fanso in December 1975 and Faay Tsenkay in an interview in 1977 alluded to some fighting when the palace was set in flames by the Germans, but neither could say how extensive it was and if there had been casualties. But it was well remembered by them that the expedition had come unannounced and unexpected, stayed for a few days in Kumbo, visited and looted compounds, and treated people 'like monkeys'. It is recalled that they beat and shot at people 'like animals', and killed a man in *maandze nggay*. There is no reason to doubt Houben's report that there were two 'battles' (or rather hit-and-run skirmishes as viewed from the Nso' side), one around the palace and another at the Bambuy camp sites. What is more curious is that the heavy casualties, allegedly more than 55 killed, on the Nso' side, are not remembered by a single informant. It is strange that so many deaths could be so easily forgotten if one recalled that smaller losses—'about thirty'—in an earlier raid on the Nsungli were reckoned as very high. In any event, according to all oral tradition, the German party occupied the palace briefly, and set it on fire on their departure.

According to some they immediately set out for Banyo amid the general confusion they had created; according to others, and this agrees with Houben's report, they first returned to their camp before they made off. Many people along the route to, and in Kimbo' fled to safety, some as far as the forest of the Oku-Nso' border, but a number followed the *Fon*.

What seems odd in the Houben episode, too, is the fact that within a matter of perhaps about 2 1/2 months relations between Nso' and the Germans deteriorated rapidly without any compelling evident cause. Von Pavel and von Ramsay had gone through the kingdom very shortly before, with no criticisms of their reception. Can we attribute Houben's brutal

military-diplomatic bungle, which seems to have turned a possible friend to foe, simply to bad soldiering and quartermastering? As we saw, Houben justified his attack on two grounds: first, that provisions ordered two days earlier (from Babungo most likely) were not forthcoming when he arrived, and only sent in small quantities on further request; second, that the Bansos unexpectedly attacked him: its 'prearrangement' is presented as a post hoc justification. In two days a message from Babungo, or even Baba', would have barely had time to arrive, and it was not easy in the middle of the hungry season to have provisions at hand when crops in the neighbourhood were green but not yet ready for harvest, especially when palace stores had been depleted by earlier visits. Moreover many people had taken to their heels. But the looting of the palace would be interpreted locally as war on the Nso'. There is something a trifle laughable in the description of the attack he orders on the 'centre, left and right wings of the enemy'. At the end of the first fight, with two wounded, he risked another without a doctor. Instead of going on to his destination he set out to capture the fleeing *Fon* and was taken on a wild-goose chase at night to an unidentified place where he failed to find the *Fon* but says he killed five resisters. During the second battle he claims that 'several hundred' of the enemy had attacked and was unable to count the enemy dead (compared with 50 earlier) because of the gathering darkness. No mention is made of his interpreters or initial sources of intelligence other than his two prisoners from whom he purports to gain the impression, after 'interrogation', that the *Fon* had been plotting with his 'sub-chiefs' to fall upon him. One of these prisoners is, shockingly, shot.⁴ How much of Houben's report is a defence of his actions or an excuse for his failure to control his hungry soldiers cannot be known from the evidence we have at the moment.

Silence covers an operation in which at least 55 people of a hitherto amenable group are reportedly killed. Or otherwise viewed, when a plot to fall upon a German force is resourcefully turned against the foe. There is no reference to it in the DKB nor is it specifically referred to in the later reports of 1905 and 1906, nor in such memoirs as we have been able to consult. As it happened the Governor, von Puttkamer, was in Germany at the time according to his memoirs (1912) in which no mention is made of the event. It appears from Mohammadou's catalogue of German archives at Yaounde (1978) that Houben temporarily took over the Banyo station from Lt Sandrock on June 20, 1902, and was relieved by Lt von Madai on 23 July, 1902. Unfortunately this file, when handlisted, was in considerable disorder, with a number of missing sheets. Nevertheless it would seem to us rather unlikely that the expedition was designed with official intention to secure the

final submission of the large chiefdom of Nso', as informants naturally assumed; such an operation was scarcely to be contemplated in the course of the reinforcement of Banyo station, where the officer-in-charge had been murdered some three months previously.

We meet Houben again in April 1903, under captain Langheld's command, when he is taking a small contingent back to Duala at the end of the Bangwa-Fontem campaign (DKB 14, 392). We also hear of him again in Germany in 1903, presenting a bead necklace to the Linden Museum Stuttgart which is rather strangely described as a 'gift from the chief of Banzo' (p.c. Pierre Harter): it was of the valuable type called *Saakinciy*. This was a minor gift by comparison with the elegant carved stool from Nso' he presented; this, 40cm high and 32cm in diameter, is of unusual design, the round seat supported by a threefold frieze of what appear to be conventionalized frogs.

A month after Houben's passage, according to Moisel's map sheet (1913) and accompanying guide, Lt Graf von Stillfried, a veteran of the attack on Bafut and Mankon in late December 1901, was mapping north-eastern Nso'. Neither this visit nor the presumed return journey of Stamm to collect the looted ivory, is recorded in the DKB, or remembered locally: the palace was still in ruins and the *Fon* and others in hiding.

In the course of 1902, in 1903, and late in 1904, officers of the German Military station at Bamenda made several close approaches, for example to Babessi on the Nso' borders in January and April 1903 and November 1904 (Lt Hirtler, DKB v.14, 300-301, 491-493, v.15, 587). There is, however, no mention of an administrative visit to Nso' in this source. We learn from Langheld's memoirs and his contemporary official report (DKB v.14, 392) that at the end of the second expedition against Bangwa-Fontem, in April 1903, two groups, in total 42 men, under captain von Germar and Sergeant Rippa, marched to the north via Banyo, but we have no indication of their route.

During the first eight months of 1904 the Anyang revolt and general disturbances in the upper Cross River area, and to the south of its district, occupied the station's garrison, which was temporarily depleted. Trade routes to and from Bamum were a centre of attention later. From the end of that year and during 1905 the station set about re-establishing its hold on the district with determination: after a punitive expedition against Kom captain Hans Glauning made a demonstration march through Oku and western Nso' to the Nchanti and Dumbo areas and beyond in August-September 1905, but his very full report, to which we shall return, makes no mention of a confrontation in Kimbo'.

Our informants placed the palace-burning within a year or so after Ramsay's passage, years being seen in 'terms of dry seasons, and well before the 1906 war, and all stated that the palace was restored a good long time before it. The *Fon* himself is said to have spent a couple of months in Mbuluv* before returning to Kimbo', when, according to Faay Tsenngkar, he stayed in a sleeping-house built for him in Sarnto' Anyuy,* close to the palace, while the palace was restored.

The reason for the palace-burning was much debated among our informants, some putting it down to an intervention by Mfo Njoya of Bamum who, since July 1902, had prudently welcomed the impressed Germans, and had suffered from Nso' raids along his western frontier: but Houben's action precedes the first German contact with Bamum by Ramsay and Lt Sandrock by about a month. Others thought it more likely that the Germans were looking for arms, especially breech-loaders, and that the surprise was deliberate; the leakage of modern arms was indeed an intermittent German administrative worry, which led to recovery measures in the Bezirk later (1908/9). But no such worry is mentioned by Houben. They were of course known to other Grassfielders as occasional slave-raiders across their borders, except where they had pacts. Faay Tsenkay, as we mentioned earlier, attributed the palace burning and all the subsequent troubles with the Germans to the skull-trophies. But the general belief was that the Houben expedition must have heard 'bad stories' about Nso' from the Bamum and the Babungo and had been induced to punish them. This is perhaps a backward reflection of later events, but indicates the search for some local explanation for the reversal of German attitudes.

By August 1905 the marching road from the Bamenda Station, via Babanki Tungo and Bamessing to Babungo had been completed. Glauning started his march to Oku on 25 August and was met submissively at an outlying village by the *Fon* of Oku bearing women's gear, a basket on his back and carrying a hoe. He explored the area, reaching the almost deserted Crater Lake, noting numerous forges, and remarking on the friendly relations Oku maintained with its larger neighbours. He wrote (DKB v.17, 235-241):

This district we subsequently passed through--Djoti [Jotin-Noon], Ide [Din], Nko [ngkor] and Bebem all belong to Bansso ... Djoti is a day's march from Kumbo, Nko two. From the latter one then passes through the large district of Banten, belonging to Bansso. The expedition, on account of its unexpected appearance met no direct opposition, yet all the villages passed through were deserted. Later the chief of Bansso severely punished Nko because its inhabitants had not prevented our passage through their land ... Bum is the central point of the kola trade from Nko, Oku, Bansso and

Bekom ... High forest is ... also found in valleys and on mountain slopes, as in Bekom, Oku and Bansso and Kambo [i.e. the high country or Nkambe plateau north of Nso'...Elephants are relatively numerous occurring even in the highlands of Bansso and Kambo ... Cattle of the small humpless half-wild kind are at present found in Bansso and Bafum [i.e. Bum, Wum and Funggom]: they are no longer found in Dumbo, Kentu and other places owing to the long-standing Fulani raids ... Wood-carving is practised in Bekom, Bansso and the Bafum districts ... Elephants are chiefly hunted by Hausa who usually give a tusk to the chief of the area of the hunt. The inhabitants of Mambila, Kambo and apparently also the Bansso hunt elephants for themselves; they are mainly taken in pit-traps ... In Bekom, Oku, Bansso and Kambo the main article of trade is kola ... The highland tribes such as Bekom, Oku and Bansso have constructed strong and united political systems under powerful chiefs. They have absorbed the surrounding weaker tribes. Thus Bansso subjected Nko, Djoti and Bebem...

Glauning then quotes a population estimate for Nso' by 'the Englishman Taylor', a Royal Niger company agent encamped in Kentu, as 50-60,000. We have no evidence that Taylor or any other European agent of the company ever visited Nso'. L.H. Moseley visited Bum in 1897 and the map attached to his report to the Royal Geographical society in 1899 shows Nso' more or less correctly placed. This population estimate (which Glauning later thought exaggerated) is possibly derived from reports from Hausa or Jukun sub-agents engaged in the regular trade between Nso' and Bum via ngkor, and between Bum, Takum, Wukari and Ibi, where the Royal Niger Company had established a substantial trading post in 1883, tapping existing trade currents.

Dr Kaberry, who visited Din and Jotin-Nooni, as well as Banten, collected no information on the German passage there. In Kimbo' it was later suggested by the late *Fon* Sem III that the 'punishment of ngkor' referred to a garbled account received by the Germans of the earlier pre-colonial incorporation of ngkor, following a demonstration of strength by a prince's war band. The surrender of the *Fon* of Oku, with basket and hoe, was recounted to her as Glauning describes it.

A summary report for 1905 (DKB v.16, 557) merely adds that 'no sign of submission had been received from Bansso'. There is no further mention of Nso' until the succeeding year when a brief notice precedes a more detailed report of the punitive expedition by its commander, Glauning. This brief notice (DKB v.17, 416) however, makes one interesting statement, which we quote:

After the end of this expedition (against other groups) the 2nd and 6th Company undertook the invasion of Bansso, which had long been planned,

since all attempts to secure its peaceful submission, for years, had been unsuccessful.

We can find no evidence that Nso' was declared a closed area, dangerous to traders. Nor have we found any evidence of repeated attempts to negotiate peaceful submission by European officers, though it is impossible to exclude occasional and unrecorded traffic between the stations of Bamenda and Banyo; it is vaguely recalled. But perhaps local agents were sometimes used to convey political messages. To such an approach may belong the widespread story told in Nso' and also recovered by Chilver and Kaberry from the late Mr Nintai of Babungo, confidential clerk at the Station during the German period, and keeper of the 'Chiefs' Book', and from the Chief of Ndu in 1960. The *Fon*, Sem II, on being invited to make an act of submission on pain of military sanctions is said to have taken a handful of finger millet (saar) and letting the tiny seeds trickle through his fingers, replied: 'What have I to fear? My people are as uncountable as these.' As a favourite theme it has undergone transformations. Another version claims that the finger millet was sent as a ruse by the Babungo who wanted the Germans to attack Nso', claiming that it was sent by the *Fon* of Nso'. Yet another version holds that the *Fon* of Babungo used the millet seeds to describe the large Nso' population and force to the Europeans. We should explain that finger millet was a crop peculiar to Nso' and the area north of it, and played a part in royal ritual.

But here is an account nearer in time to the events in question, from the cartographer Max Moisel. He visited the *Fon* of Babungo (Sanggi), whom he describes as a 'jolly old gentleman with a full grey beard', shortly before his passage through Nso' in November 1907. 'The Chief told me with the pride of the awkward situation in which his continued loyalty to the station had placed him in relation to his neighbour, the powerful Bansso Chief, and how the encroachment of the latter had, finally, in the year 1906, made the Bansso Expedition necessary.' (DKZ, 15, 1908, 271). Nso' and Babungo share a common boundary zone: the control of an economically important area called Kwa'nso', from which the Nso' claim to have anciently expelled the Babungo, may well have led to friction. This is not, of course, Glauning's story. Tradition also has it that from the time of the palace burning onwards people often fled to the bush whenever it was said Germans were passing, and that the *Fon* avoided having to receive them by going away from the palace to the villages of Mbuluv or Mba', where he had his palm groves. Such reactions could be interpreted as acts of insubordination to the Germans, who, by now, had a well-established routine of 'obedience to the Station', initially involving plentiful supplies, the provision of carriers and guides, a

promise of labour for the plantations or station and an expected gift of ivory, with more demands to follow. Besides, Glauning's reported belief, in 1905, true or false, that the *Fon* of Nso' had severely punished Ngkor for letting his expedition pass freely must have convinced the Germans that he would not willingly and peacefully accept German authority in his country, an assumption repeated by Njoya (1952, 134). An invasion of the kingdom was thus inevitable.

We now epitomise Glauning's account of the Bansso Expedition, interlarding it with Nso' versions of events:

Two companies of the Schutztruppe were involved, the 2nd with 5 Europeans, 90 soldiers and a machine-gun, and the 6th with 6 Europeans, 100 soldiers and a machine-gun. In order to break down resistance more rapidly and decisively the force was divided into two, the 2nd to approach from Bamum, the 6th from Babungo, and both were to join forces in Kumbo. The 2nd Company, having marched to Bamum from Bamenda reached Fumban, where no doubt it picked up its Bamum auxiliaries. It then marched through the districts of Palum, Fomlum, Kumbam and Kubokam. Kumbam and Kubokam 'had been abandoned for years owing to Bansso raids'. It crossed into Nso' on 27 April and on the 28th had two engagements at Fonka' (Ngkar) and, Mundim' (Meliim probably) also called 'lye' (Yer). On 29 April it reached Kimbo' after slight resistance and had joined forces with the 6th Company on the same day. The 6th Company had marched from Babungo on 27 April and had fought a pitched battle near 'Wukowe' (Vekovi), on the 28th. The other villages on the line of march to Kimbo' via 'Tsuku' (Shuukov?) had been abandoned'. In order to regain contact with the adversary, who had pulled out towards the north, and to clear the neighbourhood of Kumbo of the enemy, numerous strong patrols, some under European leadership, were sent into the outlying districts in the period from 29 April to 3 May: these generally met with strong opposition.

Chief Joia [Njoya] of Bamum, who, since his father had been defeated and killed in battle with the Banssos seven (sic) years earlier, was a grim foe to this people, had joined the expedition with about 200 auxiliaries and had personally taken part in battle. But, by degrees, he was followed by large numbers of Bamums who traversed the country plundering, over whom he had not the slightest control; consequently he was dismissed with his people on May 3 and escorted to the frontier by a European-officered patrol.

We pause here to fill in the picture from the Nso' viewpoint.

Nso' knew (possibly from traders or even mail-carriers between the Bamenda and Banyo Stations) that war with the Germans was imminent and were prepared because it was better to fight than to continue to live in fear. This determination gave confidence. The *manjongs* were mobilised and repeated market announcements were made about the impending war. Spies, agwey, were posted at the borders to monitor and report on enemy movements and routes. The Germans came supported by the Bamum auxiliaries, and had recruited Bali Nyonga and Babungo as carriers and messengers. It was a difficult war for Nso', described as 'real war', *rer see rer*, as opposed to 'small war'.

Fighting began from the Bamum side. The Ba' side *manjongs* made their first contact with the 2nd Company at Ndzerem and were pushed from there to Jakiri, where there was some fighting, and from thence to Ngkar, where the forest afforded some cover. Meanwhile Gham side contingents, some of which had been heavily engaged near Vekovi, went, according to the late Faay Tsenngkar, to Ndzeen, having heard that the Bamum were coming there. Not finding them, they went to Ndzerem where the first fighting had taken place and then followed the Ba' fighters to Ngkar. From Ngkar the Nso' forces were pushed in a night attack to Shaangway, or Yer. Both sides were exhausted. Part at least of the German 2nd Company camped in the *maandze* at Tabessob overnight. It seems not unlikely, to judge from Glauning's campaign sketch-map, which shows an engagement at 'Mwelle', that the brush at Jakiri was not with the 2nd Company but with patrols of the 6th, since the 2nd had marched from Ngkar towards Yer via Tabessob.

According to Baame, Sheey woo Do', whose brief account of the battle with the 6th Company was recorded by M.D.W. Jeffreys at the village of Kam, it was hereabouts that the main battle took place. The Germans were deployed in three groups, one on the left of the village, one facing it and one behind a hill on its right, which it skirted and then attacked up the Kam stream, taking the Nso' fighters in the flank and 'rear. According to Sheey woo Do' only two Vekovi men escaped, by taking to the river Kam: wading down it they came out at Jum, a princely compound at some distance. Other versions claim that not a single Nso' fighter survived the Vekovi encounter. Faay Tsenngkar placed the hottest battle at Kicoo close to Kam on a *Kaavi** (market day) and related that the *manjong* called *mekong*, of some 40 men, was wiped out at Kicoo. The subsequent route of the 6th Company is shown on Glauning's map as via places he calls 'Tsuko' (perhaps Shuukov), 'Karkun' (a misprint for Ngkarkuy perhaps), 'Keikwe' and 'Aschu' (perhaps Shuv), while Kaberry's informants give a route past Wvem and Ngkarkuy to Meliim, which accords closely with the mapped route and the meeting point of the

two columns. The German force is said to have reached Kimbo' on a *Reevy** (first day of the week) and *mfu*' groups scattered and waited in ambush. The town was, of course, deserted. From there, as the German record states, attacks were launched on surrounding areas. According to our oral sources, the war spread to the villages, each village fighting its own battle. These attacks were ruthlessly conducted, groups in hiding being indiscriminately fired on and women and children killed. Much of the killing of unarmed civilians and the burning of houses is attributed to the Bamum. A bird's-eye view was given of the first phase of the war thus by Faay Koonggir:

Many people stood on the hill here at Koonggir to watch the people waging war on the Germans. People came in on a Ntangrin* and went straight to Ngkar on that day. There was heavy fighting at Kov Ngkar [the forest of Ngkar], where the Ba' went. Gham went to Gwarkang near *Fon* Ndzeen (a sub-chief). The Dzeng people did not come in because they thought there would be an attack from the north. Mfu' Gham waited at Gwarkang, but no one came, while the Germans burnt houses. Yes, Dzeng thought the Germans would come there. The fight at Ngkar brought in many *manjongs* from Ba' side. After that each village was left to fight its own battle as the main force was scattered after Ngkar. Yes, before the Germans came into Kimbo' they had sent a messenger to see if there were many there. Many had already fled and a few hid in houses. So the report was "Not many".

Meanwhile the *Fon* and his entourage was moving from place to place, eventually hiding in the forest between Banten and Ngkor, called Kov Diri or Kov Magvem. Some *mfu*' groups reassembled at Dzeng. We now return to the German narrative.

Since the bulk of the Banssos had fled to the north, the expeditionary force made for the north on May 4, the 2nd Company making for the eastern escarpment and the 6th following the western. An outpost under sergeant-Major Schmidt, with Sergeant Koellner and 46 men, occupied a fortified camp in Kumbo. On May 4 the 2nd Company found the place Dje near Kufum [Dzeng near Kifem] and the neighbouring wooded ravines heavily occupied by the enemy and after a battle lasting several hours drove them back and pursued them to the north in patrol actions. On resuming its march along the eastern escarpment the Company met with no further opposition. The 6th Company had marched, practically without fighting, via Banten to Djoti and had, by means of a European-officered patrol, ensured that Oku was peaceful.

On receiving the report that the Bansso chief himself, with many warriors and wives, was staying in the extensive forest between Banten, Nko and Nsche [Nse'], the 2nd Company marched out from Tang in Ndsungle

(sic) towards the west to bar him from the route to the north. In the night of the 8th-9th May Lt von Wenckstern was sent to Djoti to convey the order to the 6th Company to hinder the enemy's retreat to the south and west while the 2nd Company advanced from the north and east. On May 9 the forest area was attacked on all sides. The enemy suffered heavy losses and numbers of men and women were captured. Between May 9 and 19 the area was continuously harassed and watched over by the 2nd Company from Nsche and Nko, on the east, and by the 6th, from Banten and Djotti, to the west. On May 19 a patrol of the 6th Company came upon the camp of the Bansso chief. They were embroiled in a serious battle in the course of which 30 of the enemy's men were killed. The chief, who was himself wounded, succeeded in escaping. During this period the post in Kumbo was frequently molested at night by Bansso bands, apparently with the object of freeing prisoners, but these were beaten back without loss. On May 20 both companies arrived in Kumbo, while European-officered outposts remained occupied in Nko until the 21st and in Nsche and Banten till the 22nd. From May 22nd onwards all outposts were withdrawn to give the Banssos an opportunity for peace negotiations. On the 17th the sub-chiefs of Djoti and Ide, and on the 18th the sub-chief of Nko sued for peace. Since serious resistance could no longer be expected and the 2nd Company was in a position to complete the subjugation of the country, the 6th Company was released from the expeditionary force and, on May 27, began its march to Bamum. On May 28 the first Banssos came in and asked for peace. From then on hostilities were, in general, suspended and only from the 4th to the 6th June were a few patrols sent out, since the negotiations were being too long delayed. European-led patrols were sent twice to Babessi on the suspicion that they were harbouring Bansso refugees, but no guilt could be fixed on its chief. On June 5 the chief councillor of the Bansso chief appeared in the camp and sued for peace definitively. On June 14 Captain Glauning, together with the assistant doctor Eckhard and 20 soldiers, began the march back to the Station via Babessi, Babungo and Babanki-Tungo until the conclusion of payments under the peace terms and the completion of arrangements for the road (from Babungo via Babessi, Kumbo and Taakuy to Ntem) a post of 50 soldiers, under Lt von Wenckstern and Sergeant Koellner, was to remain in Kumbo. On economic grounds the destruction of numerous villages and the capital was avoided. Only the small village of Mundim (Iye), from which the route to Bamum was constantly disturbed by the Banssos, was burnt down.

We pause here to fill in the picture from the Nso's side, and we do so with no attempt to reconcile the versions of the speakers. Faay Kitukela, a

commoner lord, and maternal relative of the *Fon's*, together with his neighbour, the very aged Faay Nsenyuy, at Dzeng, in 1960, have been explaining to Dr Kaberry the sacrifices made and the omens taken at his *kidze ke nsii* (hunting shrine):

... The same sacrifice is made for war. They sacrificed before the Germans came... it was a fowl. The omen was bad (i.e. it did not fall with its right wing uppermost). Some people wanted to run. But my father said that as they would be captured anyway it was better to stand and fight. The women hid in the forest with the children, but the Germans captured them and took them away. Other people took refuge here. Kitiwum came and helped Dzeng. Mbam (a northern district) did not come for Faay Taansam had fought there and 30 people were killed from his compound which is near Faay Sangfir's. Dzeng (i.e. its *lav mfu'*) did not have many guns, the Germans many. The Vemvemi (Bamum) with them insisted that Nso' should be killed and the *Fon* captured. They reached here, some with guns, some with spears. Women and children were killed so that Nso' should die, so that no women should be left to conceive Nso'.

The battle with the Germans took place first near the day-market at Dzeng. The *Fon* had been hiding at Kovvifem.* He went to Kov Magvem after the Germans had passed through Mbam. Then he came to Dzeng after the Germans had passed. It was from Dzeng that he sent Taankum to surrender to Kimbo'.

My father lost two sons and shot a German soldier. When the Germans had passed my father killed a goat because the Germans had burnt his compound and spoiled all things. He made the sacrifice because the things he had formerly used for making a sacrifice to the earth had been burnt. So he sacrificed to atone for their loss, at the *shuunggay* (the threshold of the lineage hall) and all *visber* (agnatic branches) and all the *won jemer vee la'an* (descendants of lineage daughters) attended.

Faay Tsenngkar (Sife) in 1960:

Mfu' men gathered at Dzeng for battle there. (The Faay himself was with Lavgham--a *mfu'* society officer.) The Banten people fought at Kov Diri or Kov Magvem as it is now called, in Memfu. The *Fon* was at Magvem while the battle was going on there. The Germans were out to capture the *Fon* who was hiding in the forest. It was there that Yaa woo Faa was captured by the Germans ... The *Fon* had gone on ahead of the Germans to Dzeng and a hut was built for him there since he cannot sleep in anyone's compound. Yes, the Germans fought near Kitukela's and his father, who had a *lav mfu'*, shot at

and hit a *bara'* (European, foreigner). No big man was killed there. 'The slaughter in the war was terrible, though. I think 1000 Nso' must have been killed. The Germans took captives, especially the women, to Babungo to keep them there. The *Fon* saw that if he did not give in, all his people would be destroyed. After he had surrendered the Germans gave back many of the captives, maybe 1000 or so. It was Taangkum, the *kibay* (royal councillor) who was sent to Kimbo' to clap hands, but when he arrived the Germans demanded the *Fon*, so he went back to the *Fon*. I myself remained for a while at Dzeng after the surrender so I did not witness what followed. But I heard that the Germans, when the *Fon* came, vacated the *nto'* and camped at Ndzeendzevtsen's (the compound of an important royal councillor) and also that they kept prisoners in the two *mfu'* houses.

An elderly *wan wan nto'* (prince's prince's son) living in Bamunka (1960), who wished to remain anonymous, spoke thus:

When the Germans attacked, the *Fon*, after temporary refuges, went to the forest called Diru and hid there. After that the *Fon* moved from place to place and came to Dzeng forest. Kuynto' *wan nto'* (i.e. a prince) was there and so was I, a boy, with him. Then Taangkum, because the Germans had been asking for the *Fon* to come in, fired guns and went to the Germans in Kumbo pretending to be the *Fon* and saying they could kill him if they liked. I know nothing about the *mtaar* (commoner) lords begging the *Fon* to surrender. I know that the Germans occupied many houses in Kimbo', including the two *mfu'* houses.

From Faay Koonggir in 1958:

'The first to go to Kimbo' (to the Germans) was Taangkum. He pretended to be the *Fon* (i.e. represented him), but the Germans did not believe him. So he went back and told the *Fon* that if he did not come, worse would happen, and that the Bamum were everywhere, killing people, women even. Nso' did not kill women in war. Some *wir mtaar* (commoners) also went to the *Fon*; the one I remember best is Faay Ka' of Vekovi. .sp 'The *Fon*, before he came to surrender, left Dzeng for Kovvifem with Ntoombu', Faay Taangkum and Koonggir. Also with him were Faanjang and Kuykishwang, but no other *ataanto'* (great retainer lords). Kwanggha, the Faay Taawong, an old man, had already been killed in the fighting.⁵ When the Germans were known to be coming the *Fon's* store of ivory had been taken to Kovvifem, together with the *vifa ve wong* (lit. 'things of the country', the sacra of the royal cult) and some other valuables. The *Fon* came into Kimbo' on a *Nseeri* day,* and Yeela', then just a *wiyy nto'* (king's wife), came with him. The *vimbang*

(Europeans) were in Ndzeendzevtsen's compound; they had left the *lav njong* and palace: they had at first stayed in the palace and kept captives in both *lav se njong* (war lodges). .sp When the *Fon* surrendered he said: "Here is a fowl (a symbol of surrender) and flour" to show he had surrendered--the flour was for the soldiers. The day he surrendered he gave about five tusks, then more little by little. Yes, the number might have reached seventy. The head of *Fon* Sa'ngguv (the Bamum king Nsa'nggu) was handed over at Ndzeendzevtsen's.⁶ The *Fon* had been told to transfer it. At first, they say, he sent another, an old one, with hair on it, preserved with camwood, and the Germans smelt it and said it was not the right one. Sa'ngguv's head was brought at night, secretly. Yes, they say there was hair on it. Children and ordinary people were not allowed to see it.

In 1963, the Yeela' in question (one of the two leading king's wives) called Fewo, died. Her death and mortuary celebrations prompted reminiscences of the German war and of her part in it. Dr Kaberry, present at the time, recorded an account from Faay Faanjang which she later checked over with Mfoome Gham* also present, and here it is:

The *Fon* was at Dzeng with *vikiy nto'* (royal wives) and some others. *Wir mtaar* (commoners) had come to beg him to make peace and said: "The seed of men (*nggooy wir*) is finishing." At first the *Fon* refused, saying: "I have not fought." Then he fired guns, once with the right hand, once with the left, then stopped. The *afaay* (lords) then said: "No, you were 'held' (chosen customarily) to be *Fon*, not to expend people. For a *Fon* exists because of people; if there are no people there is no Fonship (*vifon*)."⁷ The *Fon* then asked the *faay* what was wanted.⁷ He replied that what was wanted was that the war should end, since so many people had been captured or killed. The *Fon* said: "What do you want me to do now?" And the *faay* said: "We want the *Fon* to cool the war and finish it." The *Fon* said he had heard. He then sent Ntav (a well-known *nshiyilav*) to call on Faay Faanjang who was then in Kimbo'. Faanjang came, and in reply to the *Fon*'s question said the people were finished. Then the *Fon* told Faanjang to send messengers to each of the main areas, two to Kimbo' and the surrounding villages, and two to Noonni, two to Ngkum, two to Dzeekwa'. All the *atar nte'* (village headmen) were to come into Dzeng on a *Kiloovey* day.* They came. The *Fon* told them that he had heard that many were captured and many killed and asked them, did they want the war to end? They replied: "We have been too afraid of the *Fon* to say that war should finish. But it is as the *Fon* says, and indeed, we are agreed that we should give tribute (*nshwi*) to the Europeans." The *Fon* then sent them back to their villages and said he would go to Kimbo' to meet the Germans. People feared to accompany the *Fon*. The *vi bay* (royal councillors)

would not go, except for Toombu', Faay Ndzeendzev (the Great Councillor). The *vikiy nto*' would not go except for Yeela': the others feared. So the *Fon* with Toombu', Fewo (i.e. the later Yeela') and Faanjang went to Kimbo' and reached the site of the old market where there was a tree. He had brought his *kava*' (royal stool). He sat there, and Faanjang went down to Ndzeendzevtsen's (where the Germans had their command post) to report to the Germans that the *Fon* had come; and Ndzeendzev sat with the *Fon*. Then the senior officer asked Faanjang if it was truly the *Fon*. Then he blew his whistle and called his troops and told them not to touch any Nso' man while he was speaking to the *Fon*. Then they blew a trumpet. Soldiers went to bring the *Fon* to Ndzeendzevtsen's. The *Fon* came and sat there on his stool. The senior officer there questioned him and asked him if he was the *Fon*, for he had never seen him. The *Fon* replied that he had never expected to see this officer himself but 'a *tav ne shaa mo*' "You have shown yourself stronger than I". The *Fon* said he had never had to give anything away with his right hand (i.e. surrender) but now he must do this. He was asked where his wives were. The *Fon* said many had been captured. And where his people were? He said they were captured or killed. Then the officer said that the *Fon* could stay at the palace and that what he wanted from him was the *Fon* of Bamum's head. .sp The palace had been cleaned and fires lit in the rooms but many things had been taken or destroyed. The *Fon* then said he himself would not be able to find the head. The Germans then asked who would be the *Fon*'s trusted messenger. The *Fon* said "only Faanjang". They asked, why Faanjang? The *Fon* replied that he could not send Ndzeendzev, who was a great lord. There was no wine in the palace. There were no wives to attend to the *Fon* and get water. But *won nto*' (princes) had been captured and were held at Ndzeendzevtsen's. The *Fon* asked for their release so that they could fetch water and firewood.

Then Ndzeendzev, the Great Councillor, asked Faanjang to look for the bag containing the head of the *Fon* of Bamum. He (Faanjang) chose people to go and search. They went at night. It was kept in a cave near the head of the Buy and Mbim streams, beyond Taashibii. The head could not be kept in the *nto*' (palace) because it was the head of the *Fon*'s brother. It was in the charge of Taakwa', Faay Kinteng, former *nshiyilav faay* (royal page) at Taashibii. It was not kept in the compound, but in this secret place in the bush. Every month the *Fon* sent camwood to the *faay* for him to rub on the head. The head was brought in the night to the *nto*'. The *Fon* told Faanjang to show it to the German officers. The least senior, like an ADO, smelt it and said: "This is not the *Fon*." But the people insisted that it was. And then the

senior officer came and smelt it, and said it was the *Fon*. Then the war finished.

Then officers called the Vemvemi and they came and were shown the head and said it was that of Sa'ngguv.

The *Fon* asked for the return of those captured (and held at Babungo). The Germans took down their names. The *Fon* sent Faanjang with German emissaries to get them back. They went three times. The first time they brought 800 back. Altogether they got only some 1500 and 7 had died. (The assumption here is that women had been improperly retained, 'stolen' as wives.) That is why there was lack of friendship between Babungo and Nso' for a time. The *Fon* said that those who had gone to Dzeekwa' side (a southern Nso' area) were to go on living there. Then the Germans demanded two ivory tusks and the *Fon* gave them, and later on 70 were sent.

As for Yeela's role the late *Fon* Sem III confirmed that she had been with his father at Dzeng and had accompanied him to Kimbo'.

We now bring in some general versions collected by V.G. Fanson, principally from Yaa woo Faa, Paa Sa'ngguv, Paa Paulinus Lukong and Faay Tsenkay. These informants were adamant on the point that enemy casualties in the war were also substantial. Nso', they say, killed many warriors on the German side, principally their Bamum allies, in the battles at Ngkar and Dzeng and in ambushes at Kimbo'. At least one European is said to have been shot at Dzeng, but the Bamum carried him away, dead or alive. The Bamum, they say too, looted, massacred women and children and burnt compounds during the greater part of the war. Our informants also emphasised that the Germans never set eyes on the *Fon* from the beginning of the war until he came to surrender to them in Kimbo'. In fact, only a few Nso' dignitaries, among them Ndzeendzev, Taangkum and Faanjang, knew exactly where the *Fon* could be found at any given moment in the war. They also say that when the *Fon* surrendered at Ndzeendzev's in Kimbo', the Germans imposed a number of demands: the head of the Mfo Mum which the Nso' were keeping, elephant tusks, and people for work in the south and on the German road through Nso' to Banyo, all as war indemnity. The Germans then released many people, but still took away some men and women. They recall that a couple of years later the Germans imposed a head tax on Nso', commutable to labour for the station.

The manner of Nsa'nggu's death, and the return of his head continue to be the subject of story-telling. Versions from the Bamum side, in which Nsa'nggu's death is seen as a Samsonic suicide to ensure a filial succession or was made inevitable by a half-brother's rivalry are discussed by Tardits (1980, 194-9). Nso' versions, as might be expected, differ from these (for one see

Kaberry, 1962), in accordance with the standpoint of the teller. The head of the killer's lineage stressed the keen fight which led to the decapitation of an enemy warrior, made prominent by his fine headdress, later recognised as Nsa'nggu;⁸ a *mfu*' officer told of a plan to surround Nsa'nggu's party and capture him; the *Fon* emphasised the fortuitous nature of his death in the confusion of battle, since Kings are not supposed to be killed. The insistent interest of the Germans in Nsa'nggu's head seems to have left its mark on Nso' versions. Here is a new one, just emerging, as it were, which calls for closer investigation.⁹ It is that the head was taken by the Nso' together with the *vifa ve afon* ('things' of the *Fons*), which would normally include a headdress, ornamented scabbard, beads and other ornaments. While the head was kept in secret the 'things' were kept at Nse', a northern sub-chiefdom. So when Nsa'nggu's head was handed back the 'things' were not. These 'things' are allegedly still to be found in Nse'. The Bamum appear to have been assuaged after avenging the death of Nsa'nggu and the many Bamum killed with him by the Nso', and the Germans, as well, demonstrated their satisfaction by decorating Njoya in 1906 (Njoya, 1952:134, and see the photograph of the event in Geary, 1988, 57).

As for the actual handing over of the head to Mfo Njoya we have a brief account collected by Kaberry from a very old former *Sheey* of *ngwerong* in 1958, which suggests that a party of Nso' retainers accompanied the Germans to return it: this informant recalled that prominent among them was one Sheey woo Waar, son of a Nso' princess, and that the party needed to be protected from the rage of the Bamum crowds. There is an official account of it from Lt von Wenckstern, left behind in Kimbo' to ensure that the surrender terms were adhered to, and road-making started. It was handed over at a place called Batabi, a day's march from Fumban. *Fon* Njoya and his people had doubted that the head would be genuine but when they saw it he broke down and most of his people wept. Once he had recovered his composure he stroked and embraced it and ordered it to be wrapped up in the remnants of the garments worn by Nsa'nggu in battle.' (DKB 18, 259-260). Mourning ceremonies followed, and are described in general terms in this source.

Glauning's official report gives an interesting if summary picture of pre-colonial Nso':

Maize, Durrha (Sorghum), plantains, bananas, cocoyams, various kinds of sweet potato, occasionally groundnuts and cassava, several kinds of yam, beans, many varieties of vegetables, peppers, sugar-cane, cotton and, on high ground, much tobacco, are grown. [There is no mention of finger millet, *saar*, which was usually grown after maize was harvested, at the end of the rainy

season.] The kola tree is common. Probably it is of a different species from that found in the southern districts... Raffia palms are mostly found by watercourses. Fowls, sheep and goats are plentiful. Cows, of the small race, belong only to the chief. Bee-keeping is keenly pursued.

The Bansso houses, some 5 to 6 metres high to the roof, are roomy and neatly built in Grassland style. The floors are paved with small pebbles. Each village has at least one meeting and drinking hall with carved doorposts. Both frontages of the two meeting houses in Kumbo were hung with about 900 skulls of Bamum and Nsungle warriors. For the storage of corn cylindrical containers of "bamboo" are used: these are horizontally placed on a wooden stand and protected with a grass roof. Almost all villages lie in the fields between kola trees and bush and give a friendly impression. The Bansso chief "Tschimbum" [Sembum or Sem II] is descended from the same Tikar stock as the Bamum chief. His predecessors first conquered the original inhabitants of the land, the people of ngka and Nserum [Ngkar and Ndzerem, both sub-chiefdoms south of Kimbo'.]

The present Bansso kingdom developed as a result of the immigration of great numbers of people native to the neighbouring Nsungle lands and the conquest of ngko, Djoti and Bebem. The enmity with Bamum is as old as both kingdoms and seems to have its origin in family quarrels. It is said of the chief, as is, incidentally, the case with many Grassland chiefs, that he can transform himself into a snake, a bird or a stone and so make himself invisible. [This is claimed in tradition as the reason for the failure of the Germans to find and capture the *Fon* during their war with Nso'.] The population, I reckon, on the basis of my limited knowledge of the country, to number about 20,000 souls ... The handicrafts of its natives include carving, ironworking, pottery, the making of cotton cloth, and mat-weaving.

The Banssos are in trade relations to the east and north with Ntem, Nsungle, ngko, and Bafumbum [Bum] and to the south with Babessi, Baba, Bamunka and Bambala [Bambalang]. In the former lands, which are in commercial contact through Hausa middlemen with Banyo and the British border area [i.e. including the Niger Company's factories and agents], rubber, kola, hoes and goats are exchanged against Hausa cloth, beads, palm-oil and salt; in the latter tobacco, honey, goats and hoes are exchanged against cowries, earthenware, vessels, etc. We have no information on where ivory is sold. Guns are bought in Babessi and Baba and seem to come up from Yabassi as a rule. Given better outlets to the coast the export of tobacco, wax, goatskins and maize, which is abundantly grown, might be considered, in addition to rubber, kola and ivory. Given its height and climate, and land

suitable for combined agriculture and cattle husbandry the country also lends itself to settlement by Europeans.

As to the last item, one German family, the Telschows, father and son, described as farmers, did in fact settle in Kimbo’.

Were the casualties of the German war as dreadful as Faay Tsenngkar thought? A. Ruger (1960, p. 199) writes: ‘The Bansso were on 5 July (June?) 1905 (sic) forced to comply with a deed of submission obliging them to pay penalties and deliver up a deserter and, in addition, to send 150 forced labourers to the coast and an unspecified number to build the road from Babessi to Bansso and to the borders of Banyo. In addition the villages of Djotti, Ide and Nko were to send 50 labourers to the coast. The expeditionary corps slaughtered 7-800 persons and captured 96 men and 1,085 women and children.’ This is presumably an official estimate of fatal casualties and prisoners, obtained from the German Colonial Office file, RKA 3353, which he quotes. To these we must add the deaths not on the battlefield, some caused, no doubt, by looters and camp followers. Others subsequently died of wounds or as a result of the privations they endured, to judge from anecdotes collected by Kaberry. The number of non-combatants who were able to reach the comparatively safe havens of Ntem, Ntumbo and Mbot, old allies, must have been few. Most of the campaign, moreover, occurred in the ‘hungry season’. We are inclined to think that Faay Tsenngkar was not far out in his estimate.

Glauning’s published account makes no mention of casualties suffered on the German side in the campaign, apart from attacks of bronchitis and pneumonia. In addition to the expeditionary force of 201 (including Europeans) from Bamenda and about 200 Bamum auxiliaries, the ‘large numbers of Bamums’, many times more numerous than the auxiliaries who accompanied their king, and who ‘traversed the country plundering’ in scattered groups, must have swelled the numbers of the German side very considerably. It seems improbable, on the face of it, that all returned unscathed, and that Nso’ claims to have inflicted casualties can be dismissed as mere boasts. Auxiliaries fighting without uniforms and unidentifiable by tattooed numbers might well have been either left unrecorded, mistaken for Nso’, or quite unknown if they occurred at a distance from officered Schutztruppe posts or patrols. Nso’ resilience and accommodation after the defeat might be noted too. When Moise¹ passed through Kimbo’ late in 1907, the market was back in full swing.

Ever since the early encounters with the Germans, an indelible impression of them has remained in the minds of the people. This impression is perpetuated in some very common expressions in *Lamso*. It is

common to remark about a person: *wir shi'ir moo Jaman a* (a person is as bitter as the Germans), *ghar e wo Jamane* (hold with German hands, i.e. firmly with force or energy), *kifu ki tav moo Jaman a* (a thing, or person, is as strong as the Germans); or to ask: *dze Jaman a?* (is it German, i.e. by force?), and *wo-oo yen Jaman a*, (did you see, that is experience, the Germans?—an expression used to shut up someone who boasts about his past experiences or age). The expression *Jaman-ee ne' Nso' le* (how harshly the Germans treated Nso') can be heard in songs. It is common in Nso' to talk of 'force' and 'hostility' against a person as 'Jaman', or to criticise a person for behaving like a German. To look at someone in such a manner as to frighten or force him to do something is to look at him with 'German eyes'.

The Germans were feared because they lacked compassion, although in later years there was more admiration for their power, hard work and the durability of their goods; they were also (we do not know when) to be represented in the supports of the *Fon's* stool and on the frontage of *lav mfu' Gham* as symbols of power. Nso' people believed that 'the Germans had no time for beauty'. Although contacts with them from 1902 through the period of their colonial rule was hardly fourteen years, compared with forty-five with the British, the Germans are far more vividly remembered in Nso' traditions than the British. When the First World War broke out, Nso' had no sympathy for the Germans and were pleased that they were defeated and sent away. The only Nso' people who regretted their departure and hoped that they (especially the missionaries) would be allowed to come back were the adherents of the Roman Catholic faith--a small group of Christians and catechumens, later joined by a few soldiers and more carriers who had received instruction in the internment camps of Fernando Poo. Their particular experience of Germans had either been privileged or of an altogether more personal and friendly character.¹⁰

Endnotes

1. According to Zimmermann (1909), p. 175, the European staff, apart from Pavel, who assembled in Bali to start the march, consisted of Captain Glauning, who acted as surveyor, Dr. Zupitza, medical officer, the First Lieutenants stieber and von Madai, Zimmermann, Sergeant Fischer and the medical Sergeant Hammerle.

2. Unfortunately, Father Emonts (in Nso' December 1912-November 1915) while recording many items of interest from Peter Wamey, former station Interpreter (and then catechist), who accompanied the German forces in 1906, juxtaposes them to secure a more dramatic effect so that it is impossible to recover the true sequence of events. The burning of the palace is thus wrongly associated with the final punitive expedition which, though more compounds were burnt down than it admits to, spared the palace. This has misled other writers and suggests that Father Emonts, who does not cover things up, was unaware of the Houben episode.

3. According to I. Ballhaus, in her study of the Concession Companies in Stoecker (ed.) *Kamerun unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, vol. 2, 1968, p. 136, Ramsay was in Tinto in mid-January 1902 attempting to enforce the company's monopoly of wild-rubber sales in the area, contested by the old-established John Holt firm. She places the expedition to Banyo in May 1902 (p. 141), its time of arrival, but does not quote the DKB report.

4. The Banyo file previously cited suggests that the execution of prisoners called for an explanatory report from the General Staff to the Governor.

5. According to Faay Taangkum Kuy, the aged Kwanggha was captured at Sa'nyar. He had refused to come in to Kimbo' to surrender to the Germans and was killed. Later his skull and bones were exhumed and reburied in Kimbo'.

6. Prof. Claude Tardits has shown in his *Le Royaume Bamoum (1980)* Annexe I, p.913ff. That the death of Nsa'nggu in battle' and that of his brothers Milliém (perhaps the ngwalem of Nso' tradition) and Ndaam most probably occurred in the years 1885-1887. Kaberry's Babungo informants placed it well before Zintgraff's passage in October-November 1889, and

thus probably in the early part of the reign of Sembum II of Nso' (d.1907). Her informants in Ngkar and Dzeekwa' made it clear that small raids between Nso' and Bamum continued sporadically into the German period, interspersed by periods of peaceful trade.

7. Faay Koonggir, as we saw, recalled Faay Ka' of Vekovi as a prominent commoner spokesman. Others mentioned Faay Mbiim of Bam-Meliim.

8. In 1958 Kaberry received some information on this matter from Faay ngkavikeng or Myem, then apparently about 70 and born shortly after the event. This man had been a confidential attendant upon the *Fons* Mapiri and Bi'fon, presented to the palace as a page by his father. The father was a refugee from Bamum, related to its royal house through his mother; he had fled to Nso' with his wives on learning of mounting intrigues against him. He was described by his son as 'a sort of *mfoome*.*' He had been allowed to settle, under supervision, between ngkor and Din. He much later told his son that he had been summoned to the palace from his exile's retreat to testify whether the head taken was indeed that of Mfon Nsa'nggu, which he did, in tears. The head was then in a bag filled with powdered camwood, he recalled. This sober story differs from those of the storyteller's trade, for example the trickster tale collected by Jeffreys ('Nsaangu's Head', *African studies*, V, 1, 1946).

9. This version was narrated to Dr Fanson in Yaounde recently by Mr David Kukah, head of the National Geographical Institute, a prince of Nse', and amplified by one of his elder brothers who was visiting Yaounde. It is also recorded by Professor Miriam Goheen, 1989.

10. The mission was composed of the Sacerdotes Cordis Jesu and artisan lay brothers from the German Province of the Society who arrived in December 1912; they were, briefly, joined by five Sisters of the Divine Providence of Munster. All not already embodied in the German forces were taken away in November 1915 to be interned and repatriated. During their brief stay, throughout which they maintained good relations with the *Fon*, Ngga' Bi'fon I (1910-1947), they started a school for boys, a domestic training centre for girls, and an infirmary, and had taught carpentry and other crafts. They also established stations at Essing and at Njinikom. Fr Emonts, their chronicler, became quite fluent in Lamnso'. Their gentler manners were contrasted with those of other unofficials by Kaberry's informants. They were credited too with the introduction of yellow potatoes and the art of

making sun-dried bricks. Their departure prevented the realisation of a weaving industry designed to provide remunerative employment locally.

Appendix About The Principal Informants

Faay Faanjang: hereditary titled palace retainer with privileged access to the *Fon*. He gave the appearance of being older, and was said to be one of the oldest people in Nso' in 1960. In 1906 he would have been in his early '20s; it is not, of course, clear whether he is always speaking of himself or of his father and predecessor to the faayship.

Faay Koonggir: hereditary royal burial priest, and member of the dynastic clan. He thought he was born during the reign of Sem II; died 1961 or 2; was 'about seven' at the time of Nsa'nggu's death; had his first wife at age of about 25 or 26, after the first Germans passed through Kimbo' in 1902; was eye-witness to the burning of the palace and the Nso'-German war of 1906.

Faay Taangkum Kuy: birth-name, Sife; died 1961 or 1962; son of the *taanwong* or royal sacrificial deputy high priest, Kwanggha, the latter half-brother of the Nso' ruler Sembum or Sem II (d. 1907) at the time of the events described. A strong youth at the time of the 1906 punitive expedition and one of the *Fon's* litter-bearers on the ailing Nso' ruler's last journey to the Imperial Military station at Bamenda, where the *Fon* died in 1907. Sife subsequently became a confidential page to the next short-lived ruler, Mapiri (1907-1910). Apparent age when interviewed, about 70.

Faay Tsenkay: hereditary palace retainer, responsible with Faanjang for overseeing the palm-wine supply, died c. 1982; was already a boy old enough to be a page of *ngwerong* when the Nso' fought the big war against the Germans in 1906, probably in his 'teens then; was eye-witness to the burning of the palace in 1902; was probably in his mid-twenties at the outbreak of World War One.

Faay Tsenngkar: of a cadet lineage of the dynastic clan. To all appearances was about the same age as, possibly a trifle older than Taangkum Kuy since after the defeat he was sent with a gang of road labourers to Babungo to keep an eye on German movements for the *Fon*; he was, perhaps, 70-72 in 1960.

Paa Felix Javnyuy Tah: died 1988; was a lad of the age of circumcision (8-12) when the Nso' fought the Germans in 1906; was among the young people of his village of Kikaykela'ki who were frequently rallied by a Nooni caretaker of the German rest house to carry him in a litter to his village.

Paa Paulinus Lukong of Kov Ngkar: died c. 1980; was 'about ten' in 1906 when the Nso'-German war was fought; learnt more about the battle in Ngkar from his parents.

Paa Peter Sa'ngguv: died in 1977; an elderly man and leading elder of the very large Ndzeendzev (Great Councillor's) compound; in 1958 appeared rather younger than he claimed, which was about 65. Of the events he remembered, one of 1913 (the burning down of Ndzeendzev compound by a rioting mob) was evidently experienced whereas earlier events were hearsay; a son of Toombu', the Great Councillor (d. 1925), he had important connexions, and heard much discussed so his excellent memory for opinions and hearsay is useful.

Shuufaay nggoorin (Mbiame): died in the early '80s; already had a wife when the Mbiame returned from Oku to their village in 1907-10, perhaps in his early '20s then; totally blind and hard of hearing when interviewed in 1977.

Yaa woo Faa: died in 1976; taken away by the Germans after the 1906 encounter when her breasts were 'very small'; a few years earlier had been made *yee fon* (queen mother-of-the-fon) while a 'small child' of about 10; was recovered from the army brothel service some years after 1906 from Yaounde, according to M.D.W. Jeffreys (MSS) , possibly by Glauning's successor Menzel; was perhaps c. 14-16 in 1906, in her mid-eighties when interviewed in 1975-6.

Glossary

Kaavi - the market day at Kimbo', and the last day of the Nso' eight-day week according to some reckoning.

Kiloovey - the second day of the Nso' week, a rest day for women farmers and one of two sacrificial days in the palace in the past.

Kinsa'way - official announcement in the market place" in the *Fon's* name by important retainers members of the *ngwerong* society q.v.

Kovvifem - lit. forest of old settlements, a site and ancient capital north-east of Kimbo' containing the burial place of earlier kings, a house of sacrifice, and many ruins; still a centre of royal ritual.

Lav mfu' Gham - the lodge of the *mfu'* warrior society of the Gham sector; like the capital, Nso' was divided into two sectors, Gham and Ba', for military purposes, the former royal hunt, and public work organisation. *Mfu'* was the most prestigious of the warrior societies, under the *Fon's* patronage.

Lav njong (also lav *manjong*) - a local lodge in the network of military and hunting societies open to adult males. There were many differently named lodges, meeting in the compound of a notable to drink palm-wine supplied in turn. Their leading officers could be called into the capital's lodges to receive messages and instructions.

Lav se vinyo (sing. *lav kinyo*) - drinking halls of clubs or associations, in later times often also circulating credit clubs, meeting weekly.

Mbuluv - a village about 7 km from the kingdom capital, Kimbo'.

Mfoome Gham - one of the two retainer leaders of the military and hunting sectors, the other being Mfoome Ba'; the man in question had been a personal page to *Fon Ngga' Bi'fon I*, 1910-47.

Ngkar - the largest of the tributary and conquered chiefdoms of Nso', south south-east of the capital.

nsheelav (or *nshiylav*) *faay* - a personal page or attendant on the *Fon*, recruited in boyhood, and normally of the *nshiylav* or retainer category.

Nseeri - third day of the Nso' week.

Ntangrin - seventh day of the Nso' week, reserved to the meetings of the *ngwerong* regulatory secret society (in fact a graded system of male associations) and, formerly, to its cultic apotropaic observances.

Ntem - a village chiefdom in the Mbo' area (present Nwa sub-division) about 100 km to the north-east of Nso'; formerly a market visited by Nso' traders.

Reevey - the first day of the Nso' week, reserved to the secret *nggiri* society; its members are princes and male members of cadet royal lineages who may not join *ngwerong*.

Sarnto' Anyuy - a lineage head's compound just below the Nso' palace (*nto'*) in Kimbo'.

Sheey - a title given in the past to substantial heads of sub-lineages as well as to executive officers of the two principal secret societies, now more widely distributed and acquired. Thus:

Sheey *nggiri* - the title of an executive officer of the *nggiri* society, an office held by a young man for about nine years, and retained on retirement;

Sheey *ngwerong* - the same for *ngwerong*, where the office is paired.

Taala' wir nso' - a Nso' lineage or sub-lineage head, presiding over a compound; in this context a man of some dignity and substance.

Wan nto' (pl. won nto') - lit. child of the palace, a-prince or princess of the first generation.

References

- Emonts, Johannes, SCJ, 1927, *Ins Steppen- und Bergen Innerkameruns*, Aachen, 2nd ed. (1st edition 1922).
- Geary, Christraud M., 1988, *Images from Bamum*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.
- Goheen, Miriam, 1989, "The Earth Shall Give Judgement", *Boston University Working Paper*, No. 145.

- Houben, FA 1/112, 34-35 (Archives Nationale de Yaounde) Bericht des Oberleutnants der sfk Houben, Banyo, über das Gefecht bei Kumbo am 4.6.1902 und den Überfall der Bansos auf seine Kolonne am 7.6.1902.
- Kaberry, P.M. 1962, 'The date of the Bamum-Banso War', *Man*, 219-220, 112.
- Langheld, Wilhelm, 1909, *Zwanzig Jahre in deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin.
- Moisel, Max, 1908, 'Eine Expedition an die Grasshochländer Mittelkameruns'. *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 15.
- Mohammadou, Eldridge, 1978, *catalogue des Archives Coloniales Allemands du Cameroun: Le service des Archives Nationales de Yaounde*, Tokyo.
- Njoya, Sultan, 1952, (transl. H. Martin). *Histoire et Coutumes des Bamum*, Douala.
- Puttkamer, Jesko von, 1912, *Gouverneursjahre in Kamerun*, Berlin.
- Ramsay, Hans von, 1925, 'Entdeckungen in Nord-West Kamerun' in Hans Zache (ed.) *Das deutsche Kolonialbuch*, Berlin, Leipzig, 288-293.
- Ruger, Adolf, 1960, 'Die Entstehung und Lage der Arbeiterklasse unter dem deutschen Kolonialregime in Kamerun (1895-1905)' in Helmuth Stoecker: (ed.) *Kamerun unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, V.1, Berlin.
- Tardits, Claude, 1980, *Le Royaume Bamoum*, Paris.
- Zimmermann, Oskar, 1909, *Durch Busch und steppe (1892-1902)*, Berlin.

Native Administration In The West Central Cameroons 1902-1954*

E.M. CHILVER

This is an account of the work of European political officers, viewed through their spectacles, in a small part of west Central Africa between 1902, when a German imperial military station was built in Bamenda, and 1954, when the Southern Cameroons obtained its first instalment of local political autonomy. The area lies between the Fulani emirates of Adamawa and the northern edge of the equatorial forest, on the fluctuating boundary of two administrative philosophies.

Since this was written, David E. Gardinier has provided an account of British policy in the mandatory period in the whole territory, with many useful references—see ‘The British in Cameroons, 1919-1939’ in Gifford and Louis (eds.), *Britain and Germany in Africa* (New Haven, 1967). This has been followed by Emmanuel Chiabi’s overview, ‘British Administration and Nationalism in Southern Cameroons 1914-1954’ in Martin Njeuma (ed.) *Introduction to the History of Cameroon in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London and Basingstoke, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1989).

* This essay was largely based on the scrutiny of some papers in the Buea archives and the divisional and Native Authority registries in the former Bamenda Province in 1958 and 1960. In the former, correspondence between German military station and the Imperial Government in Buea between 1908 and 1914, and some Assessment and Intelligence reports and associated correspondence were consulted. Copies of the latter had recently been transferred from the Secretariat, Lagos, to the Federal Nigerian archives. In Bamenda annual and quarterly reports, and files relating to Native Administration and chieftaincy matters were consulted. In 1960 the most important provincial and divisional files no longer in current use were being transferred to Buea, recorded and card-indexed, and the bulk of the surviving German papers had been salvaged and were being listed under the supervision of Mr E.W. Ardener. I was grateful to the Committee for Commonwealth Studies in the University of Oxford for study-leave, and to the authorities and missions of the former Southern Cameroons, in the course of two study visits in 1958 and 1960 in the company-of Dr P.M. Kaberry, for their kind hospitality. Dr Kaberry’s studies of the sociology of the Bamenda area date back to 1945, and she generously allowed me the use of her files and notebooks. I was greatly indebted to Dr M.D.W. Jeffreys (then SDO, Special Duties) for help in the collection of material

The politics of an area the size of Wales, with a population of less than half a million in the 'fifties', will appear rather parochial. The larger issues of policy studied by Margery Perham in *Native Administration in Nigeria* (1937) and *Lugard: the Years of Authority* (1960), and the influence of the Permanent Mandates Commission and the Trusteeship Council will emerge rather more shadowily than they would if the scene had been viewed from the Resident's desk in Buea rather than from the Divisional Officer's trestle table in the old German fort at Bamenda. For most of the period of British colonial rule the bulk of political life in Bamenda which can be retrieved from records consisted of the dialogue between a handful of alien officers and those spokesmen of the ruled they chose to listen to. This dialogue was transmitted upwards to the Resident, the Secretary for Native Affairs, the Lieutenant Governor or Chief Commissioner, the Governor, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and to international agencies, losing its particularity and the momentum of shared experience along its route. The directives and circulars which flowed down to the Divisional Officer had to be translated by him into the local idiom of the compromise between administrative policy and chieftdom or village politics whenever they involved the ruled directly. The Divisional Officer was the node of this system of political communication which persisted unchanged until 1949.

German Foundations, 1902-15

'The little bit I have got to take over,' wrote Lugard to his wife in March 1916, 'will give me as much work as a much larger area.'¹

The 'little bit' of Kamerun allotted to the united Kingdom by the Allies fell into three zones: a strip of coast with a high, fertile, volcanic hinterland, a narrow belt of rugged forest, and the western part of the montane grassfields that continued into the French sphere. Each had presented their German conquerors with rather different problems of military occupation, economic exploitation and district administration. The western coastal zone had, since 1896, become the main centre of a highly capitalized plantation industry which had radically changed the initial pattern of economic penetration from the coast by European trading houses, German and English, and their native allies. The forest was colonized by the plantation industry here and there, but retained something of its original character, given it by the middlemen of Duala and Calabar and their upcountry trading partners—that of a zone of small-scale forest exploitation making some use of imported slaves and delivering its palm oil and kernels, some wild rubber, ivory and hardwoods to factors and native traders. The redirection of its products to ports under

German control seems to have arrested the development initiated, in the nineteenth century, by the entrepreneurs of calabar.² The grassfields to the north of it, and divided from it by a dramatic escarpment, were linked to the plantation area and the ports by difficult lines of communication, passing through corrugated forest country. The first long-distance ox-wagon trek from the Nkongsamba railhead to Bamenda and Kumbo was made in 1912 by Telschow, a German settler: even then it could not be made without one stretch of portage.³ The first motor-car only reached Bamenda, from across the French zonal border in 1925. But the routes to the coast, provided they were policed, were passable by riders and walkers, including Europeans who could command carrier labour. In the course of their occupation of the grassfields, largely included in the German military district (*Bezirk*) of Bamenda,⁴ the Germans had constructed a useful internal network of wagon-tracks and marching roads with forced and tax-labour. These for the most part ran close to earlier trade-routes and interconnected the hinterland stations and posts. Nevertheless the grassfields, partly hemmed off from their pre-colonial outlets to the Benue and Cross Rivers, lay for the most part outside the main currents of hinterland development in the western regions of Kamerun; these flowed from Duala and Kribi to Bamum and the Ngaundere highlands, a prospective area of European pastoral settlement.

The Western Grassfields were first traversed in 1889 by Eugen Zintgraff, seeking an overland route to Adamawa. They were a disappointment to the German coast-based trading firms, since they were devoid of easily reachable surpluses of palm oil, not more greatly blessed with resources of ivory and wile rubber than more conveniently situated regions, nor endowed with any natural products except kola which repaid the heavy costs of collection and transport to the coast; parts of it provided grazing for the passage of Zebu cattle driven from Banyo to provision German settlements by drovers working for German firms, but they were, by Central African standards, quite thickly settled except in areas recently swept by Fulani or Chamba slave-raids. Their most easily exploitable commodity was manpower. From 1896 onwards labour, at first provided by the chiefdom of Bali-Nyonga under contract to the Westafrikanische Pflanzungsgesellschaft Victoria, began to reach the plantations. The newly-established concession company, the Gesellschaft Nordwest-Kamerun considered, in 1900, that the main commercial prospect for them in the grassfields was labour-recruiting. Indeed, after a regular military station was commissioned at the beginning of 1902 in Bamenda, the provision of labour was its main *raison d'être*, overshadowing all other attempts to develop the region by the establishment of cotton trials, the upgrading of local cattle, or the encouragement of small

plantations on the mensal lands of chiefs. Since the Western Grassfields were of relatively minor commercial interest as yet the triangular competition between traders, planters and government for labour which raged elsewhere was here, rather, a covert competition between the station and the planters complicated, in the last years of the regime, by the demands of railway construction.⁵ A large part of the long-distance trading activity in the north of the region was in Hausa hands, a small-scale trade demanding far less in the way of portage than was required, say, in the main areas of rubber exploitation. A German firm established in Kentu for ivory and rubber collection had failed by 1913 in the face of Hausa competition, supported in the rear by the Royal Niger Company. The ivory and rubber of the more easterly regions was exploited by the Hausa agents of German and British firms with factories in Bamum, Yoko, Yaounde, Ngambe and Garoua.⁶

The early stages of labour recruitment seem to have taken three forms, a small voluntary supply of adventurous volunteers to the Westafrikanische Pflanzungsgesellschaft victoria (WAPV) and to Government service, a larger flow of penal labour rounded up in punitive expeditions or extracted from defeated villages, and another provided by chiefs either under contract to licensed recruiters or to stave off their visits and those of military patrols.

The most heavily recruited area in the Bamenda military district lay in the south-west, within easy patrolling distance of the station; this was also the area dominated by the small state of Bali-Nyonga, the main native labour contractor. To the east lay the larger state of Bamum, first 'discovered' in July 1902, a state based to some extent on the productive use of captives taken from the surrounding peoples, and able to supply the carrier and other labour demanded of it without doing too much violence to its traditional political structure. Initially the German military administration established close relations with them both.

Between 1901 and 1909, when the scandals of labour recruitment and mortality in the plantations had at length given rise to stricter labour regulation, the military complement of the Bamenda station was frequently engaged in battles with the surrounding peoples. Some of these arose out of the refusal of chiefdoms to provide labour to the station, others out of friction between labour contracting chiefdoms and their satellites. By 1909, however, the region had been sufficiently brought to order for a start to be made with the collection of poll-tax, at a rate of 6M per able-bodied male commutable to 30 days' tax labour, and 10M for clerks, craftsmen and better-paid employees.⁷ By 1914 the military station had established an orderly, if superficial, administration over most of the large area it controlled, though pockets of resistance remained along the north-western border, even after

the punitive expedition against the Nggi in 1913. The main posts in the area were connected by bridle-paths or wagon-roads maintained, as a legally-enforceable obligation, by the villages through which they passed. Some villages had been forced to move nearer to roads for this purpose, and to enable official or commercial carrier-parties and caravans to be provisioned at fixed prices. Along these routes were rest-houses, maintained by chiefs with public labour, and courier or 'flag-posts' provisioned by them. The majority of chiefs had been issued with 'books' establishing their status as official tax-collectors in receipt of a 10 percent rebate or as minor agents of Government to be protected from the deprecations of neighbours or unruly carrier parties. The more important ones were obliged to keep 'deputies' resident at the station to whom orders and instructions or exhortations to plant new crops or prepare for the arrival of vaccinating teams could be given. Around the station itself, alongside the cosmopolitan Schutztruppe Company, a society of interpreters, messengers, carrier headmen, road foremen and domestics had grown up. This group of men was the focus of news, rumours, intrigue, interpretation of German intentions and innovations from the coast. Close as they were to the German administrators, with whom many established mutually beneficial and often warm relationships, they controlled the access of petitioners and complainants to them. Among them were some gifted men, on whom the *Stationsleiter* relied for intelligence, and to whom the conduct of inquiries and negotiations were often delegated. They were, possibly, a more effective instrument of social change than any other element of the German presence except the missions. There were two of these--the Basel Mission, which had established itself at Bali in 1903, and the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the Dehonians) who reached Nso', in the east of the *Bezirk*, in late December, 1912.

The German Roman Catholic Mission was welcomed by the military administrators, who had criticized the Basel Mission for its failure to provide German-speaking native clerks and agents for the Station. By 1910 the Basel Mission had established two middle, two girls' elementary, and nine vernacular village schools in the *Bezirk*, with an enrolment of over 700.⁸ The new Roman Catholic Mission, assisted by Grassfielders returned from the coast, had laid the basis for a large elementary school in Nso' with over 100 boys and. several others had just been started when the First World War broke out. Both missions emphasized craft training and the subsequent British administration relied heavily on the carpenters, locksmiths, and masons they produced.

The elaborate system of native tribunals introduced in the coastal areas between 1891 and 1896 were not extended inland.⁹ As in other military

districts chiefs' courts were left undisturbed to deal with civil pleas and less flagrant criminal matters, except insofar as poison-ordeals, enslavement and brutal punishments were formally forbidden. In Bamenda, little seems to have been known of their composition, jurisdiction and procedure, in contrast with the more developed areas. The Station Commander and those Europeans deputed by him to act as justices exercised a comprehensive jurisdiction, civil, criminal and administrative. They sat with native assessors, usually appointed for a year. The assessors, whose functions were interpretative and advisory, were often drawn from chiefdoms or villages not concerned in a dispute; consequently the customary law, protected in the *Schutzbrief*, was applied in a diluted and generalized form, influenced or modified by German law. On tour the officers of the Station settled outstanding disputes and received complaints in open-air moots of chiefs and elders. The Station officers' courts and moots were one of the more popular features of the German regime; the latter were often occasions for ceremony and the exchange of gifts. The effectiveness of the station courts was, of course, limited. At any distance from the station and even quite close to it, ordeals were still carried out, suspected witches disposed of, and persons sold into slavery: some of the station's own agents were well-placed to conduct small-scale slave trading and so were the soldiery. In the small chiefdom of Bameessong, for example, its chief had ordered his regulatory¹⁰ society to dispose of seven relatives before the station was brought into action in 1909 by complaints; in the large chiefdom of Nso', conquered in 1906, two of the major councillors and other noblemen were convicted of witchcraft or *lese-majeste* and executed between 1908 and 1911: only one of these executions seems to have come to the knowledge of the station. It was inevitable that many of the cases brought before the *stationsleiter's* court were the result of delation to those native agents closest to him.

In the early years of administration, between 1901 and 1909, a systematic occupation of 'tribal areas' preparatory to a thorough labour assessment and manpower allocation could not be carried out. The reduction of Bafut, for example, took two expeditions and numerous patrols which left chaos behind them but little else, until the exiled chief was restored to his people in 1909.¹¹ The administrative follow-up of the initial 'punishment' of particular districts was constantly postponed by calls on the station Company to take part in more distant expeditions, such as the suppression of the Anyang revolt in 1904/5. ² In 1904 the understaffed station had been directed to simplify its command structure by the formation of larger 'tribal units' wherever possible. Consequently a number of rebellious villages were displaced and put under the authority of the Bali-Nyonga ruler, in a military

ceremonial witnessed by the Basel missionaries; other villages were placed under one of the Meta chiefs. To judge from surviving chief's books and tax-lists the practice was often extended in the wake of the German advance. Moreover, staff shortages, the result of frequent military activity, compelled the use of other intermediaries and intelligence-gatherers, such as the Basel Mission in Bali and Bamum, and local European or African factory managers foreign to the region. In 1908 the station, under the leadership of Hauptmann Menzel (who had succeeded the redoubtable Hans Glauning, killed while campaigning), was beginning to question these practices which, on the one hand, had involved it in military support of the 'high chiefs' it had created, and on the other, diminished its capacity to control local political affairs.¹³

If one high chief was stripped of some recent vassals, however, the Imperial Government in Buea was not disposed as yet to encourage the 'premature dissolution of traditional states'. It was not until 1912 that considered new instructions were issued by Governor Ebermaier to the Bamenda station and the neighbouring military station of Banyo.¹⁴ These instructions called for closer and more direct administration and gave notice of the impending division of the Bamenda station's huge district into three; these measures were to be taken in preparation for increased European settlement and the replacement of military by civil administration. In the Governor's view the possibility that the 'Bamenda native' would soon 'be able to earn money in his own province as well as at the coast' would inevitably loosen traditional political associations, and this was to be welcomed. The *stationsleiter* was told that the practice whereby chiefs had a lien on the earnings of plantation labourers for tax purposes, and their view that the prolonged absence of their subjects on the coast was treasonable must be opposed, and the support given them by the station in their 'communal' view of economic activity and their request for the repatriation of absent subjects must cease. These attitudes were, in the Imperial Government's view, detrimental to the economic freedom of the individual. Station Commanders were instructed to "impress the mass of the population that tax is a tribute owed to the Government, which had replaced the chiefs, who no longer have any claim to tribute".

The working-out of the new policy was difficult, for how was the station to fulfil increasing demands for labour, both in the plantations and on the railway, and expand its own activities without reliance on and rewards to the chiefs in its rear? In 1913/14 military posts had been established in Wum and Kentu, but some pockets still remained completely unpatrolled in the north, north-east and extreme west of the district. The *Stationsleiter*, conscious of the

shortcomings of official policy, reported that fifteen villages had run over the border to British Takum because they had been complained of to the station and feared reprisals, because of the activities of deserters, soldiers and customs-men, and because they feared labour recruitment. Nearly 11,000 men had been recruited in that year through regular channels, of whom 2,000 were destined for the plantations and railway; more could not be recruited without grave economic and social damage. As it was 'the flower of Bali youth' had been sacrificed to the plantations' interests. Whatever might be said in Germany, the *stationsleiter* asserted, there was nothing voluntary about this recruitment: the chiefs decided who was to go. Some alleviation for the south-west of the *Bezirk* could be expected with the opening-up of Wum, but the prospects of local earnings from local establishments had receded with the discovery of tse-tse fly in the relatively underpopulated north-east of the district, en route to Banyo.¹⁵ The Imperial Government in Buea distrusted the station commanders for their reliance on military measures, their tendency to maintain closer communication with the *Schutztruppe* command at Soppo than with the civil authority at Buea, and their alleged lack of interest in economic development.¹⁶

The station command, in the years after 1908, had become increasingly bold in its scorn of the labour recruiters, had managed to get prompt approval to the closing of unadministered or restive areas to trade caravans, and made no bones about its irritation with the Basel Mission for allowing itself to be used to further the claims of particular chiefs. It grew more ingenious in presenting to the Imperial Government at Buea the consequences of its policies and the disagreeable alternatives open to it to compel fulfilment of them. Its staff, some of whom were associated with the district for as long as five years, became increasingly involved in the logic of the peoples they ruled, though oddly incurious, still, about the covert institutional background to it.¹⁷ They might well have taken courage from the new winds that started to blow at the time of Solf's visit to the protectorate. The application of a new administrative model to some of the interior districts, Bum for example, had occurred to the German Colonial Secretary, the 'system en vogue in Northern Nigeria', and he had already begun to discuss this with Governor Ebermaier when he wrote to Lugard for a copy of his *Political Memoranda* and for further information in the autumn of 1913.¹⁸

Direct Administration 1916-21

The first British military attempt to penetrate the grassfields was a failure. A British column was overrun in September 1914 at Nssankang and the advance from Takum was held. The German victory was followed by the punishment of some chiefs whose loyalty seemed doubtful, but no serious trouble developed in the *Bezirk*. In early October 1915 General Cunliffe decided to move against Bamenda from the north-east and south-west and on October 22nd Bamenda station was occupied by Major Crookenden's four companies. A detachment of two hundred rifles was left behind to garrison the station while Crookenden moved on to join forces with other detachments moving up from Chang and down from Banyo. The local retreating German forces were led by two former station Commanders, Adametz and Sommerfeld; they managed to withdraw their forces and to inflict damage on convoys and patrols.¹⁹ Before they left they instructed chiefs not to involve themselves in a 'whiteman war' and to accommodate themselves to the British as best they could.²⁰ If Bamenda was spared the devastation suffered by the Banyo district, it was disorganized by military impositions—carrier duties and the commandeering of food—and suffered from the usual deprivations of the stoppage of trade. The cash savings of the more important chiefs had been borrowed by the isolated German officers, and little new money, save commandeering notes of limited negotiability, was put into circulation.

By early December the line Kuti-Fumban-Nggambe-Yoko was securely held and Bamenda station's temporary importance as a staging point in a military supply route up the Cross River called for a civil administrator. One was spared from the depleted Nigerian service. On January 1st, 1916, G.S. Podevin crossed the divisional boundary into Bamenda, starting from Calabar, calling in 'big men' as he trekked to the Station, examining their chief's books, recording their former tax liabilities, and the considerable number of men away with the German forces as carriers and soldiers. His first tasks were the formation of an intelligence bureau and the selection of informants, interpreters and messengers to repair the gap in information arising out of the disappearance of the German station records, the uselessness of the military intelligence handbook and the failure of General Cunliffe's Moslem agents to collect any information of value. In spite of its closeness to the Nigerian border little was known of the region, and no attempt had been made to collect what had been published by way of ethnographic and linguistic research in learned journals; the local knowledge of missionaries had been dissipated with their deportation by the British

military, or their embodiment in the German armed forces. As Podevin's rough ideas of the political geography of the region improved, messengers were dispatched to bring chiefs into the station with their books. Day to day decisions, governed by the simple policy of maintaining 'the principles of Native Administration as practised by the Germans' was based upon these books, any other correspondence individual chiefs might have preserved and the impression of authority they gave.²¹

By and large the submission of the chiefs was ready, and even an occasion for the competitive display of retinues and regalia.

But the chiefs of a few large villages, though declaring themselves willing to meet political officers on their own ground, refused to come in. There was, Podevin reported, considerable unrest in Bali country. Here, it was believed, the foundations of German administration had been shaken by European officers and NCOs on the line of communications during the interregnum. These, "dabbling in Native affairs", had made individual bargains for food and carriers with breakaway village-heads in return for informal recognition. The example was catching and other breakaway attempts had been made in Meta and Bikom. In March/April 1916 a military patrol had burnt the recalcitrant village of Bamunum and destroyed the farm houses of the rebellious chiefs.

In early March 1916, the French and British spheres of administration were partially delimited though Bamunum and Chang, later to be detached from the British occupation area, remained under temporary control; the north-eastern boundary remained indistinct and the area near it was unadministered save for a couple of visits by a French tax-collecting officer. The delimitation was followed by a proclamation by the Governor-General establishing the basis of administration, namely the Laws of Kamerun, 'so far as known', and failing these the Laws of that part of Nigeria in which the administering officer had previously held his appointment. Two months later the Nigerian Native Courts Ordinance of 1914 and the Native Authorities Ordinance of 1916 were applied by proclamation.²²

Of these, and indeed of an earlier military proclamation which would have given him the legal powers he sought to make the possession of fire-arms illegal, Podevin had no knowledge until long after the event, for no Gazettes reached him for six months after he assumed responsibility for his territory. This, during 1916, included the old Ossidinge *Bezirk* and most of the former Bamenda *Bezirk*: the population of the latter according to the last German count was roughly estimated at 414,000. At the end of the year Kentu and Wum passed temporarily into the Muri province; in fact they were left virtually unadministered.²³

To carry out his civil duties Podevin was assisted 'by a lieutenant with a small patrol in Bagam, an area later transferred to the French zone, an assistant in Kentu with some interpreters, an assistant in Ossidinge, with no clerical support whatever and at headquarters two policemen, two interpreters and 12 messengers. A garrison company of the 3rd Nigerian Regiment was only available to furnish escorts and men for police duty. In the last year of German administration the main station had had three commissioned military government officers, supported by a paymaster and two NCOs used for a variety of administrative tasks, two Medical Officers, three European PWD officers, three native clerks, three interpreters, 50 messengers and various other grades. At the Wum sub-station a commissioned officer, an NCO, two clerks, three interpreters and 30 messengers were the establishment; in Kentu one commissioned officer, three clerks, two interpreters and 40 messengers. At the Kuti agricultural station near Fumban, an Agricultural Officer with supporting clerical staff and an escort exercised certain delegated administrative powers. Ossidinge had been a fully staffed and efficient civil station, with a detached police post supervising its unruly northern border.²⁴

Recruitment for the plantations caused him most concern. He had collected evidence, which he forwarded to the Resident, that the plantation managements had broken their contracts with some of the 2,300 labourers recruited with his help. But in spite of evidence that they had failed to pay wages or issue stipulated rations, a recruiter was sent up with a supporting letter from the Resident. Podevin refused to let him recruit until the fifteen hundred odd pounds owed to labour in the division had been paid. In the argument with the Resident which followed, Podevin threatened to lay his case before the Governor-General. The plantation managers were proceeded against, under German law, and Podevin received orders in September 1916 that he could stop recruiting.²⁵

A promise given by the political officer to the labourers had been broken; Podevin's anger with his superior officers was increased by what he regarded as another breach of trust, the proposal that poll-tax should be levied at the official rather than the local exchange value of the German mark: the last proclamations had fixed it at 9d. but he found that its purchasing power was 6d. in ossidinge and 2d. in the African Association's factory at Ikom, the nearest factory now active. Internally it still held to its old value as a local currency. No answer was received to his proposal that the mark should either be guaranteed or redeemed, but by the end of 1916 its official value was allowed to fall to 7d. In making his protests Podevin felt obliged to insist that he was far from being 'soft with natives': his case was based on the notion

that pledges given by political officers should be upheld, and that the value given in return for a recognized currency by European traders was 'simply cheating'.

Some intermittent consideration was being given in Buea to the form of administration in Bamenda. There seemed to be little disposition, as yet, to trust the divisional officer's advice. One Resident considered that some of the larger chiefs could run their own Treasuries and bring smaller chiefs into their scope.²⁶ But, like his German predecessors, Podevin pointed out that their authority could not be restored without the use of force: and this could not be entertained at the time. In 1917 he was instructed to raise the tax-rate: he opposed his orders with such resolution that the Governor-General finally approved the rate he proposed. Another Resident pressed him to train native clerks so that a network of Native Courts in Southern Provinces style could be established. The first instructional court was set up at the station under his supervision in 1917 and in the following year two more were set up at Bali and Bagam. By now he had the help of an Assistant Divisional Officer, who visited the most accessible eastern parts of the Division for the first time to restore the abandoned wagon-roads to use. In November 1918 the influenza epidemic reached Bamenda, and Podevin, already ailing, died in early December. Over 15,000 deaths were believed to have resulted from it in the Division.²⁷

His successor, Major Crawford, retransferred from war service in East Africa, was deprived of his assistant. He was virtually penned to the area round the station from which he emerged for five days' touring. The complicated task of recording and repatriating internees in a Division shaken by a major epidemic fell to him. Perhaps fortunately he had only one court and Treasury to supervise. The Bali court had to be closed because the ruler, dissatisfied with the treatment of his suzerainty claims, boycotted it;²⁸ the Bagam court, under the supervision of a detached military patrol under Lt L.W.G. Malcolm, dissolved because the notables concerned in it had been involved 'in a human sacrifice at the burial of their king: they were hanged. The writ of the station ran as far as military escorts could be provided or where the influence of friendly chiefs was substantial, as in Nso' where, despite the fact that only one administrative visit had been made to it, tax was regularly collected and brought to the station. No major disorders followed the epidemic, as they did in Duala and its hinterland: the Divisional Officer recorded a friendly disposition on the part of the chiefs who visited him.²⁹

The breakdown of administration in 1919 was to some extent repaired in the following year. Three Divisional Officers and an assistant were sent up at

various times and the use of force was conceded. In August part of the disturbed area, Bagam, was handed over to the French. A patrol action was set on foot against the villages which had refused the jurisdiction of the Bali court in both its judicial and tax-collecting capacity, but was fruitless. other patrols visited the Widekum borderland, the Wum district and the area between Wum and Kentu. Many villages were visited for the first time since the occupation by a tough but romantic civil officer, N.D. Duncan, an ex-soldier. For the first time since 1916 it was possible to detach officers to describe, in more detail, the political geography of parts of the Division and the effects of five years of under-administration.³⁰

Experiments in Indirect Administration

Between 1916 and 1920 no Residents had been at their posts long enough to master the human detail of the Province. They and their miserably exiguous staff were chiefly concerned to carry out international and Nigerian obligations—the identification and valuation of enemy property, the repatriation of soldiers and civilians, the construction of a rough and ready rationing system, the maintenance of the plantations and wharves; the influenza epidemic intervened to disorganize their work.³¹ The Divisional Officer in Bamenda was 14 days away, linked only by a roundabout military telegraph line to Buea and to the Cross River line of communication by mailrunner. Even though some apparatus of government was restored in Bamenda in 1920 policy was in confusion. Within a few months of one another contradictory instructions were received in the Division. The first, issued by Resident Davidson, laid it down that the whole Cameroons Province was to be run ‘on the former Southern Nigerian principle’. The second, issued shortly after the Milner-Simon Agreement had settled the zonal boundaries, laid it down that ‘the principles of Indirect Administration’ were to be applied: it had followed the recovery of the surviving German divisional papers relating to Bamenda.³²

The new instructions merely established a negative policy: the ‘old Southern Nigeria system’ was to be abandoned. But which of the precepts of Sir Frederick Lugard’s *Political Memoranda* were to be applied; and which were applicable in the situation? The removal of the Divisional Officer from the Presidency of the Native Courts, a *sine qua non* of Northern and Southern applications of the doctrine, was hardly applicable in Bamenda where Divisional Officers were called upon to introduce a new institution rather than reform an old one. Moreover, were the courts to be based on the principle of wide representation and consent as to the boundaries of

jurisdiction, as laid down in Memorandum No.8, or were 'village chiefs of influence and character' to be encouraged to take control of a village group, as a former Resident had proposed, and as Memorandum No.1 seemed to imply? The second course had already involved the use of force in two districts. The existence of a ready-made poll-tax system, a population broken in to its collection by chiefs and their retainers, and the remuneration of chiefs by means of a 'tax-dash' appeared to provide better opportunities for a more advanced form of native administration than could be attempted in the south-western forests. But experience had shown that the choice of tax-units was a delicate matter. What had already been organized could not be easily abandoned since pledges had been given. The German 'books' (some, it was later discovered, out-of-date) and the authority they were locally held to confer had been recognized during the period of status quo administration. The Bali king's special position and stipend had been retained; they now turned out to be based on an incomplete record of German transactions with him. During the brief 'Southern Nigeria' period two more 'inter-tribal' courts had been established, at Kumbo and We, and their development into the old Southern all-purpose regulatory institutions had begun. If they were to be dissolved, what was to replace them?

The reasons for the muddle in Bamenda seemed patent to the energetic Resident, Major Ruxton,³³ – lack of definite policy, contradictory instructions, lack of staff, the chaotic state of law, want of communications, want of markets. The ideological contradiction between Native Courts under direct administration with no tax, and Native Courts under indirect administration with tax had passed unnoticed. The gradual reorganization of Native Courts, based on 'tribal units', and free from the interference of foreign clerks should, he thought, be the first step. The material upon which to build administratively was, he believed, superior in Bamenda, 'owing to Hamitic influence being at work on the Semi-Bantu population'.

His Divisional Officer was prepared to go further. "Work," he wrote, was begun on the old Southern Nigeria system with its attendant use of uniformed Government officials, Police and Court messengers; the last I have heard described as the backbone of the Administration' The success or failure of the District Officer under this system is gauged by the amount of revenue extracted from litigants; every endeavour is therefore made to encourage persons who have the slightest petty dispute with their neighbour to seek redress in the Native Court. Looking at the course lists, it will be seen that the majority of cases should easily have been settled privately without recourse to' litigation. The Native Court Clerks inspired by the same High

Ideal must in my opinion have been persuading the chiefs to fine for almost every offence as no attempt at inflicting Native punishment was made.³⁴

The Divisional Officer proposed that alien clerks should be removed from the courts and local clerks appointed, that 'law-courts on the plan of the Old Bailey' should be abolished, that the chiefs' retainers and traditional regulatory societies should be employed in place of Court Messengers and Police, and that he should be allowed to make mission teachers and pupils understand that their religion did not excuse them from allegiance to the chiefs, who had evidently impressed him hugely.

The inquiries he and others had undertaken in the spirit of Lugard's proposals for the collection of records about each group of importance, had so far revealed 'about ten groups' upon which a Native Administration could be based: Map 1 illustrates the conjectured political areas which had, rather hazily, emerged from inquiries. The Divisional Officer hoped to persuade 'village heads' in each group to acknowledge a 'district head'. Later two or three groups with the same executive, judicial and marriage customs might be amalgamated. He could report that the poll-tax system in force was nominal. owing to 'the commonsense of the chiefs' it had developed into a graduated tax under which some might pay one shilling and others ten, reminiscent of the system of lump sum assessment successfully introduced in parts of Northern Nigeria. The discs issued to payers as receipts merely provided unnecessary arithmetic for his clerks; the chief should receive a bulk receipt 'since it is the Fong (chief) who imposes and receives tribute'.³⁵

This boyishly bold project of social engineering, importing the flavour of Memorandum No.5 into an area so recently viewed as Southern, was treated with a mixture of caution and patient advice by the Resident who insisted that 'star chambers' must be avoided, the justice must be public, and that the metal tax-discs, the outward and visible forms of poll-tax, should remain as a safeguard against extortion. Nevertheless, it introduced themes which were to recur.³⁶ For the time being there was a standstill to innovation while the Anglo-French draft was being converted into the League of Nations B Mandate, and while the Secretary of state considered a more general directive on the Cameroons. But in April 1922 the Resident was informed that the Secretary of state had reaffirmed the policy of indirect rule in the territories under mandate. The Native Treasury was revived and into it fees and fines and one-third of the poll-tax proceeds were to be paid; out of it came stipends for six chiefs, five being the hereditary rulers of fairly well-defined small paramountcies and the sixth a so-called 'clan chief'. Some of the districts were toured to impress upon the astonished chiefs that native law and custom, if not repugnant, should be revived. The principal innovation

was assessment 'on the analogy of -the Northern Provinces' and the attachment of an Assessing Officer, Hal Cadman, with experience of its practice among the Tiv. The new doctrines were laid down by the Lieutenant-Governor, Lt Col Moorhouse, as the resuscitation of indigenous forms of government, the consolidation of 'tribal units', the selection of the 'rightful chief', his installation with appropriate ceremonial, the re-establishment of the 'clan council' together with the definition of the jurisdiction and powers of the clan councilor chief.

Lugard, since 1923 the British member of the Permanent Mandates Commission, was puzzled, in spite of his inner lines of communication, by the turns given to his terminology and elicited a partial explanation of them from Resident Ruxton at the Seventh Session of the Permanent Mandates commission.³⁷ What, he asked, were the mutual relations of clan councils, salaried chiefs and Native Court areas? The new system, Ruxton explained, was at an embryonic state and the terms had different connotations in different areas. In the Victoria Division the German system of Native Administration, with its courts and Government-appointed chiefs, had had to be retained since indigenous forms of Government had been overlaid by the plantation system: the Bakweri tribe seemed to him 'a very uninteresting people'. In the forest divisions a basis for Native Administration was being sought in councils of clan elders, some of whom would receive stipends. Other members of the Commission were uninterested in the minutiae of small-scale administration, and thought that the preoccupation of the Nigerian Administration with it was overdone. Some thought that the absence of agricultural extension work, compulsory cash-crop schemes and the laxity of labour discipline (forced labour had been abolished in 1918) argued a hand-to-mouth policy. The Resident's view that economic development simply required law and order, roads and taxation, rather than a positive policy favourable to European investment and colonization would, the Belgian M. Rappard remarked, have satisfied Adam Smith. Other representatives thought the trust reposed in indigenous authorities misplaced: on the Mandatory's own evidence sassafras trials occurred, cannibalism 'on a very small scale' was admitted, and women were accumulated as capital. Was it enough to hope for the gradual influence of the missions? Was it proper to entrust tax-collection to chiefs and allow them the legal right to turn out unpaid labour, confusingly described as both voluntary and compulsory, for village public works?³⁸ Ruxton defended his charges from the accusation of savagery, pointing to the recent belief in witchcraft in Europe. He remained unshaken in his main thesis that the moral welfare of the inhabitants of the

Cameroons meant the development of their political capacities; his place at the table, he hoped, would eventually be taken by a Cameroonian.³⁹

Meanwhile the legal confusion which had inhibited Divisional Officers had been removed. Under the British Cameroons Order in Council of 1923 the Southern mandated territory was administratively integrated with the Southern Province of Nigeria. In 1924 and 1925 the British Cameroons Administration Ordinances under which Nigerian laws were applied by order with local modifications, provided the territory with a more comprehensive law: under these the Northern Nigerian land and Native Rights Ordinance was applied.

The other Northern Nigerian importation was its system of tax assessment, under which tax quotas were fixed as a percentage of an estimate of the gross income of villages based on yields per acre, the annual value of livestock, wage income, and the disposal of crop surpluses and manufactures at local market prices. It was a hardy attempt, given the absence of continuous crop estimates by experienced revenue clerks, field to field records and reliable market information, in a mountain country where farm plots cultivated by women were scattered on a long fallow system. Rule of thumb substitutes were found in the measurement of the yield of model plots and the periodic collection of prices of foodstuffs and imported goods at the main markets.⁴⁰

The original Assessments also proposed the form and jurisdictional area of the Native Court and Native Authority, sole or consular, or, where they had already been established, reported on their work and on internal arrangements for tax-collection. They invariably contained often misleading historical chapters, ethnological sections, and descriptions of the main features of the political system, customary law and land tenure.⁴¹ Much, of course, depended on the interpreters. Communication took place in Pidgin English, a useful medium but not designed to convey the complexities of kinship and marriage systems or the beliefs which upheld the outward appearances of rule. The reports were of value in describing trade flows and male occupations, but much less useful in their description of farming systems, since women were not interviewed.

The Assessment tours usually took thirty or forty days. One such tour, which took 111 days, provoked admiration in some superior officers for the evidence it gave of *rapprochement* with remote villages, and irritation in others for the neglect of routine judicial work it entailed. A proposal to publish it as a model for Southern Nigerian purposes provoked a long argument between Northern- and Southern-minded secretariat officers which rivalled the report in length.⁴²

Indeed, as more settled conditions gave rise to more burdensome routine, full-dress Assessments could never be repeated since the exercise involved the absence from the station of a Divisional Officer and also of other irreplaceable staff—clerks, interpreters and experienced station messengers. Consequently other devices—special reports and touring notes—kept the political information reasonably up-to-date. After the reconsideration of Native Administration in Sir Donald Cameron's governorship substantial Progress, Intelligence and Reorganization reports took their place. The large chiefdom of Nso', for example, was assessed twice, in 1922 and 1934, and between 1936 and 1938 was the subject of frequent special inquiries. The so-called Nsungli (Wimbum) area was assessed in 1923, was the subject of a lengthy Intelligence Report in 1934, a Progress Report in 1936, and other *ad hoc* inquiries. Since continuous economic assessment was impracticable, the tax quota system was regarded as too arbitrary and replaced after 1933 by a poll-tax.

The first round of Assessments gave the lie to the *simpliste* views held in 1921. They displayed an uncomfortably varied range of political systems in the Division. The 12,000 Nggi (Nggie, Minggi), for example, had a common speech and common legend of origin from the Upper Cross; their remote villages were distinct political units and appeared to be presided over, rather than ruled, by clan-heads, some of whom claimed a genealogical seniority over others, assisted by family-heads. Their liveliest institutions, a witch-finding system and a title-society, seemed to be too closely associated with repugnant practices (cannibalism was reported by hostile neighbours), to be harnessable to administration. Bali-Nyonga, on the other hand, was a compact secular monarchy with a well-developed system of appointive offices, but no regularly constituted council could be uncovered. The 14,000 Meta, allegedly of the same origin as the Nggi, were militarily formidable and combined the outward marks of small-scale village chiefship with the same fundamental structure as the Nggi. The Nso' chiefdom, the largest, was a sacralized monarchy, with a hereditary council of state, recently subordinated tributaries, a regulatory society, and local military clubs with public functions. Kom was another such monarchy, but with a matrilineal dynasty and both patrilineal and matrilineal villages. Wum was perhaps the hardest to grasp and use: it was a federal association of ward chiefs, often at loggerheads, one of them said to be a ritual primus; each of them had one or more tributaries; and dynastic succession was matrilineal in most wards. Some institutions, or rather names for them, seemed to be widespread, but their powers and functions varied.⁴³

The Assessing Officer's first task, the demarcation of a political area, was the most difficult and posed the most fundamental questions, perforce left unanswered in the general statements of policy. How far back in time were the principles to guide administrative consolidations to be sought? How much of the German consolidation was to be undone? How far were former suzerainties to be recognized if they upset well-entrenched claims? Once recognized, were the customary regalities, insofar as they were not repugnant, to be enforceable in the Native courts?

Some of the difficulties of consolidation, as well as the influence on Divisional Officers of overlapping waves of administrative doctrine, can be illustrated by a comparison of the two main efforts to organize the Meta, or Menemo as they later came to be called. Their first experience of British rule was unhappy. Two Meta villages had, after a punitive expedition, been resettled on Bali land by the Germans, and placed under the Bali chief for tax and corvee. During the British invasion they decamped. In 1916, a military patrol was sent after them by *podevin*, in accordance with his general instructions to preserve the status quo: the German *Schutzbrief* to Bali in his possession showed them to be 'subjects'. For four years the village heads refused to come in to the station and were protected by other villages. In 1920 another patrol was sent against them, and destroyed crops and huts without result. But before operations were resumed, the Divisional staff began to doubt the basis of its case.⁴⁴ The Assistant Divisional Officer, C.J. Gregg, walked the disturbed area alone and exposed himself to danger in an effort to start negotiations. He was successful. The leader, one Tabi, trusting Gregg's word that he would get a fair hearing, came in. After local Meta opinion had been sounded, the fearless rebel was recognized as 'clan head' and as President of a Native Court established in November 1922. The choice of Tabi as Clan Head was confirmed by the subsequent Assessment tour. Tabi was described to the assessing officer as the lineal descendant of the founder of the clan, the disposer of disputes between heads of other branches, and the only Meta chief with the right to receive compensation for murder and absolve persons from blood guilt. But two leading Meta chiefs stayed away from Tabi's court, one of them being a chief recognized as a paramount by the Germans. They accused Tabi of demanding a tribute of game and wine and of using the court to enforce his demands: he was, indeed, behaving like a Bali or Bafut chief. Tabi's difficulties were put down to 'a misunderstanding of Native Administration principles' and he was admonished. The two recalcitrant chiefs were persuaded to attend the new court and pay their tax through Tabi. But as soon as the Assessing Officer's back was turned the quarrel broke out afresh. It became clear, in the

following years, that payment of tax through another chief was regarded as a demeaning symbol of subjection, and could not be used to build up a Meta political unit. One of the chiefs, it was discovered, belonged to another clan and owed no 'natural' allegiance. But nothing could be done about him as he was in the wrong place. The Native Court was maintained, and despite these quarrels it worked quite well.⁴⁵

When the Intelligence Report of 1933 came to be written the meticulous reports of C.K. Meek on Ibo government and law had received a wide circulation and consolidated official sympathy for conciliar government and village courts. The new investigator asked different questions and got different replies. There was no such unit as the Meta clan, and consequently no Clan Head. There was no single chiefly line. There were five genealogically-related local groupings but the basic political unit was the village under the headship of the representative of its founder-lineage. This fact had already been recognized for tax-collection purposes, since it had proved impracticable to collect tax except through village heads. The 'rightful chief' recognized by the British held an important ritual office: he had been put forward by the Meta in order to reach a workable compromise with the white men. The former German nominee was an important man too: he was the biggest village head, whose predecessors had adopted some of the paraphernalia of the nearer chiefships not so long ago. The solution proposed was a council of village-heads and elders and a central court, both presided over by the Divisional Officers, and five minor courts, one each for the local groups; this was partly to legalize and bring under control the 'palace-jurisdictions' which had covertly persisted. The proposals were never carried out in full because persistent staff shortages made the supervision of so many small courts impossible.⁴⁶

Genealogies were used in support of the consolidation of 'tribal units' in the first intensive rounds of political inquiry and tax-assessment. In the south-western, "Widekum", areas they took the form of family trees of the main speech or local groups showing the connections between the founder-lineages of villages. The two Meta family trees collected show quite marked differences. But it is likely that the family trees they collected represented either contemporary political relations expressed in kinship terms or agreed modifications of them. In the first tree the seniority and political attributes of one lineage-head was stressed because they represented a claim to be released from the dominion of another chiefdom. Once this had been achieved, other claims could be made to seniority with an eye to fiscal independence.

A broader form of genealogical inquiry, involving the tracing of legendary dynastic interrelations, was used in the areas with more centralized

chiefdoms. Shared traditions of origin from a mother chiefdom might, it was held, imply a common customary law and a disposition to combine in Native Courts or councils. Dynastic links might be claimed or rephrased by informants when a limited aim in relation to tax-collection or courts had been achieved. One case, which took up many pages in divisional files, will illustrate the process. During the German period Ntem had been assigned to Banyo Station. After 1919 it was assigned to the British sphere and placed under the nominal administration of the Fulani District Head of Gashaka, a chieftain of the Banyo royal house. This elaborate little chiefdom had once been more important but had been reduced to a small village by repeated Fulani slaving, and its chiefship had been temporarily usurped by nominees of the Banyo lamido. The precedent that communities should not be forced to accept alien chiefs had been established in the south-west of the Division and was now asserted in the northern border areas. Its chief did not relish an association with a Fulani superior representing a former oppressor. As early as 1921, Divisional Officers had considered the attachment of Ntem to Yola Province indefensible. Moreover, it could not be visited by the Divisional Officer and received no benefits in return for tax: During 1923 the so-called Nsungli area of the Cameroons Province, less remote from Ntem, was assessed. The aged Ntem chief then claimed a dynastic connexion with a 'Nsungli' chief (in fact the Wiya chief of Ndu) and accepted his leadership. This move was assumed to mean that Ntem was a cadet chiefdom of the Wiyaone. Once Ntem was detached from Yola and associated with the Ndu chief's court and tax agency, and once the old chief was dead, there were mounting complaints about the Ndu chief's claims to seniority. In 1932, the Ntem area was assessed, and Ntem's dynastic claims examined. A very long king-list could be produced with an independent tradition of origin, supported by some neighbouring chiefs. Since the Ndu chief by virtue of his assumed seniority had been given a court it seemed evident to the Ntem chief that, once he had established his pedigree, he should have one too. "The head," he wrote, "cannot turn again and be as the shoulders." His father, he explained, had accepted the leadership of the Chief of Ndu because "he was an old man having no feet to walk again". The area was subsequently reorganized and the Ntem chief was made the president of a local court. The Lieutenant-Governor was not altogether pleased. The reorganization had, he thought, been based on 'sentiment', since there was not enough work to keep the little court busy. The Divisional Officers were perhaps more conscious than he of the merits of petty justice on the complainant's doorstep rather than at the end of a back-breaking trek.⁴⁷

But as information about the traditional politics of the peoples accumulated, 'sentiment' was difficult to avoid discussions with chiefs, village heads, their councillors retinues, governed by a code of courtesies laid down in a provincial circular, became more captivating as Divisional Officers mastered the traditional constitutional principles underlying succession disputes, suzerainty claims, boundary cases and cases about the possession of regalia. Between them and the traditional authorities there arose a common ground of political argument and respect for one another's capacity for the use of precedent and the extension and adjustment of principles to meet new cases. Some Divisional Officers found that their advice in the settlement of domestic political disputes was sought: they were sometimes cast in the local role of *tafon*, titular father to the chief. Some issues which occupied their attention must have seemed a little mysterious to a distant Secretary for Native Affairs unfamiliar with the local idiom of village politics. Sub-chief Y, for example, had been caught wearing a regal necklace of leopards' teeth: what made the offence worse was that he was claiming the right to have the regulatory society, *nggumba*. Chief X, the ruler of a Wiya chiefdom which claimed to have conquered Y, sent members of his own regulatory society to snatch the necklace from the sub-chief's neck, but this manner of settling the matter was clearly liable to lead to an affray. The Divisional Officer had to intervene. The experts of the Native Court pronounced that the necklace was a lesser matter; the sub-chief must surrender the paraphernalia of *nggumba* (the Pidgin term for a regulatory society). This he did, save for one object, the society's lector-mask, *mabu*. Another point now had to be determined: were *nggumba* and *mabu* separable or inseparable? The court pronounced them inseparable and suggested the exchange of *mabu* for the necklace. The necklace, when it was returned, was alleged by sub-chief y to have some teeth missing, so, he claimed, the settlement was void. At this point the patience of the Divisional Officer began to crack: the sub-chief was told to come into the station for a talk. This command, involving an 85-milewalk and some face-losing hanging about in the petitioners' corridor, secured a temporary lull in the dispute. But sub-chief Y had another shot in his locker. In accordance with the general policy of associating hamlet-heads with tax collection, rather than allowing it to fall, where developed chiefdoms existed, into the hands of retainers, the tax-discs sent out from the Station had been parcelled up into batches corresponding to the sub-groupings in 'quarters' of a village-area or chiefdom evident in the tax-lists. It had been explained that permission to receive tax-discs did not involve any change in constitutional relations between their recipients and Chief X. But the change was disturbing. Chief X wrote,

I wish to counted all my people in peace. I no want to separate them, like last year 1934. Please find the tax-list of 1932 and 1933. You will see (my) people are not separate. I wish (to keep) all my sub-chiefs (named). I wish to stay with them in peace as before. Because they are not My Family, they are my chiefs since long time and I wish to join all the total numbers of taxable in one place as before, and I will allow them to get their 10% for tax and I will make list, show how many each chief pay his tax. Because if DO separate the tax discs from Bamenda before send to me to give them, so they will not hear (obey) me. They always said (will always say) DO make us free, we are not under X chief again.

And so it turned out: sub-chief Y emboldened by the receipt of tax-discs, though foiled in the matter of the necklace and *mabu* asserted himself by bringing a carved stool to court and refusing Chief X the customary share of game.⁴⁸ The belief that a subordinate tax-collection agency implied political recognition by the colonial power died hard, and Divisional Officers and their Cameroonian staff were obliged to restate the principles of tax-collection constantly, and refuse to entertain claims for jurisdictional separation which were solely based on a sub-chief's delegated authority as a minor fiscal agent, even if it dated from 'Kamenda', 'Damasi' or 'DO Houseboy', the Paul Bunyans of the pioneer periods of German or British administration. 9 Political issues which were even more likely to lead to disturbances were inter-village boundary disputes. These, administratively settled with the consent of the parties concerned or by means of the inquiries provided for in the Inter-tribal Boundaries Settlement Ordinance of 1933, required prompt action, long marches as often as not, and considerable patience in the unravelling of the evidence presented: 'as some of. the surviving Land Record Books and Inquiry Reports showed a familiarity with particular traditional patterns of tribute and diplomacy was necessary if the intention of witnesses was to be understood and if they were to be cross-examined effectively.

The programme of research into local institutions stimulated by 'the inquiries into the Aba riots and the subsequent dispatch from the Secretary of State of 1930 involved no new departure in the Division: officers had conducted them when they could be spared. But if the leading theme of the inquiries of the 'twenties had been the search for and maintenance of legitimate chiefly authority, the element of consent was stressed in those of the 'thirties.⁵⁰ The shift in emphasis had Lugard's full approval in the Permanent Mandates Commission.

The Cross-current of Christianity

The first full inspection of the Division by a Lieutenant-Governor took place in 1932. A younger man than others before him, Captain Buchanan-smith was able to face the 300-mile trek on foot that his tour involved. In his statement to the 24th Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission he admitted that the northern model of Native Administration had been followed 'rather slavishly' and that there was little room, in the current system, for the Christian and educated members of the community. The new trend towards decentralization might seem chaotic but it would, he believed, give more scope to schooled men in the management of local affairs. Even schoolboys, he suggested, might take a share of the work in the smaller courts and conciliar authorities proposed. This was a far cry from the early 'twenties when scribes and literate hangers-on were shooed out of meetings with chiefs and elders by the Divisional Officers, in an effort to increase chiefly prestige and self-confidence. Buchanan-smith also reported that Monsignor Rogan, in charge of the ecclesiastical prefecture of Buea, had intervened to allay the conflicts between the adherents of the Roman Catholic mission and the chiefs, which had, hitherto, been a regular feature in the mandatory's reports.

The intertwining of mission questions with reforms in Native Administration policy was not accidental. During the period of German administration there had been a rough division of missionary activity in the area. The Basel evangelicals had centred their work in the west and southwest, the Sacred Heart Priests (SCJ) in the east. In 1920, after an earlier tour by Father Shanahan in 1919,⁵¹ the Sacred Heart Priests, now drawn from the Franco-Belgian Province of the society and then based on Bamum in the French zone, returned intermittently to their old station in Nso'. Their arrival was followed by disorders and persecutions of mission adherents in the Nso' and Bikom chiefdoms which required the intervention of the Resident: yet, curiously enough, it was precisely the rulers of these two chiefdoms who had welcomed Father Shanahan's proposals to reopen the mission. The return of the 'French Fathers', as they came to be called, had been shortly preceded by the repatriation, in 1919, of the interned soldiers and military carriers from Fernando Poo. These, during their long internment, had been indoctrinated in the camps by the Roman Catholic army chaplains and Spanish Capuchins; some 900 Grassfielders were baptized and 1,500 had joined the catechumenate between 1916 and 1919. The eastern districts of the Division among others had been called upon to send carriers to Fernando Poo; many of these were catechumens or men

who' had been in contact with the well-liked German SCJ mission. During their brief stay in Fernando Poo, over 800 sought baptism in the internment camp. The chaplains had reinforced the military *esprit de corps* of the camp by their instruction; many of the repatriated men were enthusiasts, uncompromisingly contemptuous of traditional mores. The divisional files of the 'twenties contain references to their high-handedness in attacking 'pagan practice' such as hooded secret society messengers, or destroying its symbols, such as earth spiders used in divination or fetishes protecting fields.⁵² The local groups of faithful, held together by a few remarkable catechists, such as Peter Wame of Babungo and Paul Tangwa of Kumbo, were thus powerfully reinforced by men whose loyalties were elsewhere and with whom the divisional staff had had no contact. Moreover, the eastern districts were scarcely visited until 1921, and the reabsorption of the internees coincided with a period when these districts were left to their own devices. In Nso' a church was burned down by the warrior clubs. The arrival there of the 'French Fathers' had polarized local sentiment between the minority of new men looking to the mission and the traditional authorities, now looking to the Divisional Officers for support. Even in the 'sixties literates were wont to refer contemptuously to unlettered animists as 'N.A.', and animists to literates as 'Bara' or foreigners.⁵³

The Fathers, one with earlier local, others with Belgian Congo experience, were unfamiliar with the English language and with British colonial practice, and misunderstandings abounded; their arrival, moreover, was shortly followed by a swing in the sentiments of officers towards some of the more dogmatic Northern Nigerian interpretations of Indirect Rule.⁵⁴ The hard-pressed divisional staff, initially well-disposed towards it, became impatient with the mission's interventions in favour of Christians who had offended against custom and its appeals for the severe punishment of "pagan persecutors". "For them," wrote an-irritated Divisional Officer in 1921, "all Native Administration is comprised in the word Juju." The French-speaking cosmopolitan Resident visited the scene and showed a good deal less prejudice and more patience than his officers in dealing both with the francophone mission and its adherents and evidently convinced the chief that good order and freedom of worship must prevail. But a detachment of soldiers remained behind to prevent further affrays for a time.

The stay of the 'French Fathers' was brief: the division of the German territory required a new and compatible ecclesiastical reorganization and this was carried through in 1923, when the Mill Hill Mission (st Joseph's Society for Foreign Missions) took over their establishments in the British sphere. Tension between Christians and animists lessened, but minor disturbances

and friction continued in the Division. A convinced Roman Catholic laity, sustained by six years of doctrinal teaching, angered by the petty persecutions of those they despised as 'bushmen', and vindicated in the British courts, was in no mood to welcome the justice of the Native Court.

The main issues around which friction occurred were the rights of chiefs to reserve girls for their households, their rights to recruit pages, sometimes from particular social categories, the channel of tax payments and the flight of wives and wards to the mission to learn doctrine. The right of chiefs to girls was, for them, as undisputable a mark of regality as their allegiance tributes of leopards. Adultery (even unchaperoned conversation was suspect) with a chief's wife or the wives of certain other titleholders was treated both as a polluting abomination and as treason. Boys, recruited as celibate royal attendants or boy-servants of the regulatory society for a term of years, became the messengers and executives of the chief or the society; the encouragement offered to them to leave the chief's service to attend catechism classes and avoid contact with "pagan practices" was seen by chiefs to undermine their authority, if it was done without their consent. The flight of royal wives and wards provoked even more widespread scandal; the majority of animists regarded it as a deliberate reversal of the social order. Their forcible recovery was, of course, prohibited by the divisional staff who were, by and large, obeyed by the chiefs. The runaway women were believed, quite unjustly in the majority of cases, to be living by harlotry.⁵⁵ The subsequent marriages of runaway women and young girls to Christian converts, without the consent of their guardians, could lead to family estrangements, and to bitter cases in the Native Courts over marriage payments, rights over the issue of wards, and compensation for adultery which presented reviewing officers with difficult problems in equity.⁵⁶

The difficulties over the channel of tax-payments were associated with these reversals of custom. The collection of tax by lineage-heads or palace retainers, indeed by those with whom the converts were most likely to be in conflict over desertions from the family compound or the palace, was sometimes resisted.⁵⁷ Christians or learners who had congregated around or fled for safety to mission establishments were emboldened by the protection these gave to appoint their own collectors, or to protest, sometimes with justice, against over-assessment under the 'commonsense' schemes run by the chiefs or the permitted schemes which followed the brief attempt to introduce lump sum assessment officially after 1929. The channel of tax-collection was the ark of the covenant of the earlier models of Native Administration, and proposals by Fathers-in-charge to collect on behalf of their flock as a whole were firmly rejected. "The political object of lump-sum

assessment was the association of the smallest constituent units of a Native Authority area with collection, because of the education in co-operation and responsibility the process was naively believed to confer. The Roman Catholic lay communities were not officially recognized as such units. Indeed their tendency to evolve their own systems of self-government in separate quarters and organize prestations and Subscriptions was alarming to some Divisional Officers. The separation of the Christians from the animist community was most acute in Kom where the lack of communication between the palace and the Christian quarters of the large villages of Njinikom and Fanantwi was almost complete. The Fathers, of course, counselled moderation in speech and traditional courtesy to men of title, but in Christian eyes the Father's authority had replaced the chiefs.⁵⁸ Initially the Fathers had forbidden their converts' membership of all indigenous societies, not only of the regulatory societies but of the warrior clubs which, in some chiefdoms, organized local public works; the Christians were concerned with their own, sometimes more onerous, public works, the building of churches, mission schools and catechists' houses. The Christians themselves desired separation for spiritual reasons: they were fearful of the temptations of traditional offices, which some could have filled, and of assaults on their faith. Moreover in two of the large chiefdoms in which they were strongest, the rulers were elderly men, of whom compromise with new forces, except under direct administrative pressure, could not have been expected.

The accommodation of the Basel Mission to traditional authority was relatively peaceful, and the main troubles it met with arose out of competition for its services. The Basel flock, except for flying visits from members of the Paris Evangelical Mission and contacts with the Native Baptist Church had been left without a resident missionary till 1925. A visiting missionary in 1921 reported that the old centre of missionary activity in Bali was divided by factions but that a strong movement existed in the Meta, Nggemba and Bafut areas.⁵⁹ As in the Catholic-influenced east, local catechists had kept the Christians together, among them Johannes Asili and Jacob Shu, both later to be ordained. Apart from some complaints about royal pages in Bafut, and occasional prohibitions on the attendance of women at preachings, lest they became independent-minded, there seem to have been few collisions with chiefs. This absence of trouble can scarcely be accounted for by differences in the mission's attitude to the question of polygamy, servitudes or "pagan associations". It was as strict in these matters as the Fathers. But less was heard of its difficulties because it did not ask for the intervention of the civil authorities on behalf of its agents, who were

counselled to show respect to chiefs. Possibly its easier accommodation can be ascribed to the difference in political systems in the east and west of the Division, yet there were sacralized or centralized chiefdoms in the west also. Part of it was perhaps the result of a far longer exposure there to the modernizing influences of plantation, school, workshop 'and station, which prevented the Basel Christians from claiming any special monopoly of 'new fashion'. Almost certainly the mission's pattern of evangelical settlement, its scatter of modest hedge-schools, and its eschewal of the mission quarter pattern offered less scope for political apartheid. The missionaries themselves included artisans ready to help a chief with his public buildings: and their Christians worked with them.⁶⁰

The western districts, even if they suffered from a ten-year gap in mission schooling, had had the benefit of a Government elementary school in Bamenda since 1922 and a Native Administration school in Bali since 1923⁶¹: a number of Basel hedge-schools had survived the war and these were revived in 1925. In the eastern districts in 1925 there were two Roman Catholic missionary schools; in 1924, one Native Administration school had been established. From 1930 onwards Education Officers were intermittently posted to the Division. By 1937 there were in the Division one Government, six Native Administration schools, four assisted mission schools (including a Baptist school) and 76 unassisted secular mission schools: there was no full secondary school in the whole province until the Mill Hill Fathers started to expand their school at Sasse in 1939. After the Nigerian Education Ordinance of May 1926 was applied, and the memoranda of the Colonial Office's Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa had been disseminated, the way lay open in theory for closer collaboration between the Divisional Officers and the missionaries: it became close with the Basel Mission and with the revived Baptist Mission which first established itself in the neglected north-eastern border of the Division. With the Roman Catholic Mission relations improved, and by 1937 had become excellent. Any rapid expansion of assisted schools was cramped by the limits on teacher-training and inspecting capacity: there were only seven local elementary teachers in training at the provincial training centre by the end of 1936.

Decentralization and its Limitations

The new Southern policy explained by Buchanan-smith to the Permanent Mandates Commission in 1932 required a far larger staff to implement it than was ever available: a plan to divide up the area into regular touring districts

failed on this account. 2 The effects of breaking up the larger court areas into 'natural units' and the organization of conciliar Native Authorities were negligible at first. In 1938 there were 18 gazetted Native Authorities, four areas in which the Native Court was the Native Authority 'pending reorganization', and one remote directly administered area, Mbembe: there were 30 Native Courts, seven of which had limited D powers. Many of these conciliar Native Authorities, the Divisional Officer reported in 1937 and 1938, were 'theoretical'. Full meetings seldom occurred except when an administrative visit took place or for the distribution of quarterly salaries. Revenues were so small that there was, indeed, very little scope for the proliferation of Native Treasuries.⁵³ But demands for more schools, dressers and dispensaries began to be more strongly voiced and the divisional staff fostered the notion that these might be obtained if resources were pooled. In the chiefdom areas a cautious propaganda for a supporting council was made—a 'council on which all the novel elements would receive representation'.⁶⁴ In Nso', in 1932, a Native Treasury was established and much was hoped from it, but the aged ruler could not be persuaded to select an advisory financial council of progressive notables to help him consider those heads in the Native Authority estimates which could be varied, even after substantial irregularities had been discovered in his Treasury. In some other chiefdoms, where the Native Authorities were also sole, inquiries were made about the composition of traditional councils, so that 'Fon-in-Council' Native Authorities might provide the groundwork for gradual innovation.

The slowness of the conversion to more responsible and representative local councils in Bamenda lay in part in the small output of educated men who had completed a full primary course. Those who had stayed the course were young men, still considered brash boys by their seniors: educated older men who might have entered their chiefdom's councils as hereditary office-holders had refused office on religious grounds. In fact, new ideas were mainly channelled to the Native Authorities, as in earlier times, by the Divisional Officers themselves, by court clerks, interpreters, and Native Administration staff. In any event a more rapid and adequately supervised conversion could not be engineered, at the same time as the decentralization of Native Courts, the oversight of Native administration schools, and a host of other business. The Divisional Officers were well aware of this. The Senior Divisional Officer, Dr M.D.W. Jeffreys, presented the following table in his report for 1939:

Division	Ad Staf	Est. sq. miles per officer	Est. popula- tion ⁶ per officer	Tax incidence per officer (£)
	1939			
Bamenda	2.3	3,014	122,156	8,223
Kumba	2.1	1,982	33,526	3,690
Mamfe	2.0	2,160	34,070	2,032
Victoria	2.4	485	19,390	3,242

The routine supervision of 30 courts, most of them away from a motorable track, was a time-consuming business. The cashbooks, receipt books, process books, cause books and monthly returns of each court had to be checked each month by a Divisional Officer before Court revenue was paid in and salaries paid out. At the end of 1939 eleven courts remained to be visited and 169 reviews had piled up. In the same year a new system of direct tax collection, designed to prevent evasion and extortion, had been introduced in five areas, and of *jangali* (cattle tax) collection in all. Revenue from direct taxation increased substantially and *jangali* by 50 percent. This exercise was feasible because the almost insupportable burden of road works supervision had been temporarily lifted by the posting of a PWD officer to supervise the completion of the long-awaited road between Bamenda and Mamfe, a one-way track but a motorable one, and other urgent works. With a more up-to-date collection system, and with the Mamfe road opening up new economic outlets—for coffee had already begun to be planted—the Native Authority revenues (now 65-70 percent of gross tax collected) might have increased enough to meet the demand for more of the simpler social services demanded. But the small divisional staff was largely diverted to war-duties—the provisioning of the Free French forces, the collection of wild rubber and palm kernels, and the organization of a local defence force. These activities at least absorbed some of the three or four thousand labourers returned to the Division from the plantations. Despite staff shortages the programme of improved tax collection was pushed on with the completion of new nominal rolls for the whole Division and the association of literate villagers with the issue of tax-receipts: the recorded taxable population increased by some 10,000. A third Native Treasury was set up, and others were anticipated by

the keeping of separate local revenue and expenditure accounts. A good deal of time, too, was devoted to an attempt to re-establish arbitration at the village level, in order to remove a mass of petty litigation from the Native Court and the reviewing officer's desk.

Indeed, much of the administrative groundwork for a development of the 'new Southern' system of Native Administration was laid. At the end of the war Divisional Officers felt obliged to protest that the practice of Governor Cameron's principles needed more staff, both political staff and technical staff. (The first full-time Divisional Agricultural Officer arrived in 1942, the first PWD officer in 1939.) with nearly three officers posted to the Division, some 350 days touring a year was feasible. This looked well in returns, but what did it mean? In a Division the size of Bamenda it meant that for six consecutive months an area off the motorable road might be left unvisited. Then, an officer might travel from village to village, spending a night in each and perhaps three in a chiefdom or village-group headquarters. It was, of course, easy to suppress information during such visits. In 1945 one Resident contended that the Division could not be administered with less than five officers if Native Authorities were to be visited once a quarter. "Quite apart from the uncomfortable feeling that the liberty of the subject is not safeguarded", wrote another officer, "it cannot be supposed that with so little support the most enlightened authorities could carry out those plans for the improvement of the area that are within reach of local resources. The progressive element in council is defeated, the reactionary prevails: there is always a case for inaction." Most officers felt that too heavy a burden was placed on Native Administration staff. If they were inefficient it was hardly their fault. Half of them had less than a full elementary education and many worked in areas where the language was strange to them; they had little or no formal training and supervision was negligible. The proper training of headquarters clerical staff was impossible if a Divisional Officer had to tour for six weeks at a time, leaving a job of work half-done. Desirable as continuous touring was, a station could not be left without a magistrate or Divisional Officer to deal with Native Court prisoners, petitioners who had trekked many miles to lay an urgent complaint, or messengers reporting a bitter boundary dispute that could flare up into fighting. Bamenda was regarded in Lagos as a backward Division: its Divisional Officers contended it was backward because it was underadministered.

New Politics and New Men

But the impetus of the policy of decentralized Native Administration was petering out before the end of the war as Divisional Officers took up the developmental ideas generated in the Colonial Office between 1938 and 1940, and as the promise of metropolitan funds became firmer. In 1942 an agricultural station and demonstration farm, and in 1944 a livestock improvement station was set up in the Division. Resident Harris compiled an economic survey of the province and proposals for incorporation in the Nigerian Ten-Year Plan were sent forward.⁶⁶ The new notion of mass education presented a field in which political and departmental officers could collaborate: in 1945 Dr Kaberry, a social anthropologist, arrived in Bamenda to conduct a survey of the economic role of women, the staple food-farmers, as a foundation for community development and adult education work, subsequently (after 1952) carried out by Elizabeth O'Kelly from a base in Nso'. The notion that the black art of economics was irrelevant to territorial administration had gone for good.⁶⁷ But the new interventionist policies demanded closer administration, and far more direct propaganda addressed to the folk, and no means for this existed as yet. The divisional staff, moreover, was heavily engaged in the resettlement of ex-soldiers.

On the surface the Division seemed calm: the first petitions to the United Nations from the Division reflected pension grievances and complicated land disputes, scarcely echoing the nationalist pressures which had paved the way for the Richards Constitution in Nigeria. The Native Authorities had now been increased to 23 since remoter districts had been brought, nominally at any rate, into line: the Native Authorities Ordinance, revised in 1943, appeared to give them all the scope they could conceivably need.⁶⁸ No sooner had the network of Native Authorities been completed than the consequences of the new Nigerian constitution and the new local government policy proposed in February 1947 by the Secretary of State for the Colonies began to make themselves felt.

The effects of the first were the more important. The divisional meetings of Native Authorities summoned to learn of and discuss the new constitutional reforms were initially of greater value to the divisional staff in local affairs than they expected. They could now quote a body of local opinion in favour of the administrative reforms which they advocated—the break-up of the Division into three and an increase in staff. The Division was promoted to a province in 1949 after four years of resolute official agitation, and by 1950 three new Divisions, Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe, had been created, and were staffed.

Meanwhile a Select committee of the Eastern House of Assembly had put a vast distance between the reforms in local government projected in the Eastern Region and those immediately feasible in the new Province. The report on local government reform by Brigadier E.J. Gibbons upon which theirs had been based had put its finger on the fundamental weakness of decentralized native administration, based on consent as to jurisdictional areas—the assumption that it could attract the services of educated men. The current system had neither the scope nor the prestige to attract into its membership the really enlightened African of education and consequence in the community.⁶⁹ The theory of inherent authority upon which it was based, was, he considered, out of place in a modern nation. He had proposed elective county councils with subordinate Native Authorities below them, responsible to a Local Government Board which would be in charge of a unified local government staff. This proposal was substantially modified by the Eastern Region Select Committee, and pressed even further in the direction of English local government practice by the Eastern House.

The new local government policy proposed in February 1947 accorded with the divisional staff's own notion of pooling, which they and Residents on their inspection tours had already disseminated. A series of local meetings were called to broach the question of federating the existing Native Authorities into agencies capable of administering local services and collaborating more effectively with development schemes. For the latter the ten-year plan funds and the profits of the Cameroons Development Corporation were available.

By 1948 agreement had been reached on four amalgamations--the south-western (Widekum) Federation with a population of 97,200, the South-Eastern (Tikari) with 139,000, the North-Western (Wum Divisional) Federation with 79,660, and the North-Eastern (Nkambe Divisional) Federation with 85,000. The Bali Native authority, with over 23,000, could not be amalgamated with its hostile Widekum neighbours. Like the Widekum and Tikar Native Authorities it was formed on a supposedly 'ethnic' basis, as Gibbons had recommended. The two Divisional Authorities were compromise structures, representing the best balance that could be achieved between viable size, communications and political considerations: the large mainly matrilineal chiefdom of Kom and the rather smaller mainly patrilineal chiefdom of Bum were assigned to the north-western group.

The Native Authorities had little to suggest about changes in their membership. The Divisional Officers' proposals that moots of traditional councillors and village heads (terms with elastic meanings) in each of the former Native Authorities should each elect six traditional, four untitled

literate and two women members were acceptable to the Tikari group at this stage. In Bali the ruler called together an electoral college of 60 ward-heads and notables to select representatives. The Widekum Native Authorities formed themselves into an electoral college of over a hundred to select representatives, who included primary teachers, traders and craftsmen. Early in 1949 the local government proposals of the Select Committee of the Eastern House were circulated to Native Authorities and explained by Divisional Officers orally. How far they were understood by the majority of members is uncertain. At all events they were opposed to them; the speed with which new conceptions of political authority and new procedures were being put forward, and their origin outside the Province was disturbing to all but a minority. The pressure on Native Authorities to reform themselves came from all sides. The pressure to federate was accompanied by a reform of the Native Courts, which introduced literates and women to the benches, and which showed every sign of being overtaken, in turn, by further changes consequent upon the Brooke Commission of Inquiry and special investigations which were expected to follow it.⁷⁰ Divisional Officers believed that the new mixed appeal courts could evolve a serviceable common law on land tenure, marriage and inheritance, provided that the repugnancy clauses were applied with increasing sternness in interpreting the Native Courts Ordinance.⁷¹

Perhaps the most puzzling collision of doctrine arose after the report of the Africanization Commission, appointed in 1948, had been received. This made quite specific the theory that the place of the Administrative Service would be taken by 'an improved system of Native Administration and local government' alone rather than by the concomitant Africanization of the provincial administration. This proposition, in a province like Bamenda, would have completely revolutionized the internal political system, based upon delegated authority influenced by a fair measure of free-spoken remonstrance, which passed through the narrow but protected channels of complaint, petition, Native Authority resolution, a rising flow of correspondence between members of the public and Divisional Officers, and recourse to an increasingly professional magistrature.⁷²

The gentlemen of education and consequence upon whom the Administration increasingly relied for support had formed the Cameroons National Federation early in 1949 by amalgamating delegations from the Cameroons Development Corporation's Workers' Union with a number of 'tribal' and improvement unions including three from the Bamenda Province and one representing 'French' Grassfielders resident in the British trust territory.⁷³ Its foundation had followed discussions between CDCWU

leaders and the leading men among the nearest 'French' political groupings: Ruben um Nyobe, Secretary General of the Union des Populations du Cameroun, Chief Mathias Djoumessi, leader of the Bamileke ethnic union Kumsse, and members of Ngondo, the Duala ethnic union. The CNF had been invited to attend the Provincial Meeting called in June 1949, to discuss the Nigerian constitutional reforms in prospect: it put forward a plea for a separate regional government for the British trust territory as a prelude to eventual reunification with the French trust territory. Its views of Native Administration were then distinctly unlike those of the Eastern House: it called for the codification of native law and custom to end the 'danger of disruption of the machinery of local government as the result of growing misinterpretation, misrepresentation and falsification of Native Laws upon which local government is based',⁷⁴ and for an end to the appointment and deposition of chiefs or natural rulers by the Government. The Federation considered that the existing Native Authority system was unsatisfactory but did not, as yet, show signs that it had absorbed the implications of financially autonomous, democratically elected local government.⁷⁵ The CNF was active in promoting petitions to the UN Visiting Mission and among these were two from Improvement unions in Bamenda, one of which put forward the same views on the appointment and deposition of chiefs as the CNF while the other, from the Kom Improvement Union, centred in the old missionized area of Kom, attacked illiterate and lazy councillors and pressed for a larger representation of 'the literate and enlightened'. By the end of the year a union of local associations federated in the Cameroons Federal Union, including the Bamenda Improvement Union, produced a more detailed and logically argued proposal which called for 'the purging of aged and indolent councillors', the election of 'progressive youths', the federation of Native Authorities into larger groups, and 'the development of such federated group councils (which) should eventually merge with and be superseded by the proposed local government system of County Councils and Municipal Administration'.⁷⁶

The hope of the Administration that the energies of the best men in the new associations could be devoted to community development in association with the Native Authorities, and to their democratization, was only intermittently fulfilled. The new leaders' main concern was the formation of an effective political machine at the Cameroons level, and the resolution of major policy questions--their attitude to reunification, their relations with the Northern Cameroons, and their negotiations with the politicians of the Eastern Region. The Administration, while it publicly expressed its agreement with the views of the Cameroons Federal Union, was inevitably

hampered by earlier engagements to chiefs and conciliar authorities and uncertain of the strength of the new leaders' following. The indirect elections of 1951 to the Eastern House were all uncontested in the Province; all seats were won by improvement union members or men associated with Dr Endeley's efforts to form an effective political party. But the lack of stir they caused gave the Administration no guidance about the speed with which it could press Native Administration reform in the direction of the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance of 1950. Divisional Officers were generally advised to remove themselves from obtrusive roles at the meetings of the Native Authorities at the earliest possible moment. This was impossible for the first few years of the federated Native Authorities, not only because of the mass of new and quite technical business made possible by larger revenues, but because they had to be used to disseminate information about development schemes and constitutional reforms.

In the more securely established Native Authority Federations in the south of the Province the withdrawal of the Divisional Officers from Council meetings was conscientiously carried out, and their interventions were largely limited to financial and legal explanations or the dissemination of technical information. The Native Authority Ordinance in its 1948 and subsequent revisions remained the legal basis of the new federations: consequently the Province escaped the fluctuations in local government law of the Eastern Region, and the role of the Divisional Officer could be adjusted to suit the circumstances of each Native Authority.⁷⁷

The emergence of the more militant KUNC in 1951 alongside the CNF placed the Divisional Officers in a difficulty: hitherto the CNF had been given access to Provincial Meetings. In 1952 the KUNC asked for the same privileges and for access to Provincial and Divisional Development Committees. They were refused on the grounds that they were an association with membership on both sides of the international frontier and that representation could no longer be given to political parties as such. Assemblymen were, however, given the right to address meetings of Native Authorities after their business was over.

There were stumbling blocks other than constitutional uncertainty and the difficulty of gauging the attitudes of the folk to reforms--the re-emergence, under new leadership, of old quarrels and old associations. Many of these revolved round the ancient intractable issues of tribute and suzerainty, which now became entangled with questions of new Native Authority boundaries, claims to representation on or secession from them and the delegation of tax-collecting duties by them.⁷⁸ In parts of the south-west of the Bamenda Division the main energies of the literates were devoted

to agitation and, as it turned out, expensive and fruitless litigation in the High Court concerning land formerly occupied by them but conquered from them before the German annexation by the Bali. There were other elements in this agitation: long-standing grudges dating from the German period and earlier, against the Bali overlords, expulsions which had occurred during the period of administrative breakdown in 1919/20, and the shortage of land of some of the Widekum communities. It was undeniable that the Bali had more land in relation to their numbers than communities in other parts of the Province and their land was near good communications and markets. Like other land-hungry peoples, many Widekum villagers hoped to recover their lost lands from their conquerors. Local village unions were now organized by some determined men into an all-Widekum union: the effects of common historical grievance and recognition of the Widekums as a group for Native Administration purposes were reciprocal. In 1950 one of the Widekum villages, supported by others, started a series of legal actions which resulted in an appeal to the High Court in which they claimed almost the whole of Bali land, and damages for trespass. This was dismissed with costs against the plaintiffs in February 1952 because they had not pleaded a title under the Land and Native Rights Ordinance; the judgement was hard to explain to people who had devoted more than a year to collecting funds for an appeal which they had been told they were entitled to make.⁷⁹ In March a large Widekum group descended on the Bali, looting and burning: seven persons were killed in the disturbance, which was prevented from developing into a more serious affair by the coolness of a handful of men at the moment of crisis and the subsequent posting of substantial police reinforcements. The outbreak, if it set back the reformed Native Administration, provoked a re-examination of the Governor's powers under the Land and Native Rights Ordinance (which had been in doubt) and an inquiry into the economic situation of the contestants:⁸⁰ eventually land was acquired from the Bali for the resettlement of the villages in return for cash compensation by the government. It emerged that the Widekum chiefs and their allies who had supported the agitation could not control its excesses: their popularity now depended on their responsiveness to the programmes of the new local associations. The Assemblymen who strove to resolve the feud by negotiation also failed to prevent the outbreak. The emotions of 'tribal' nationalism had been exploited by minor local leaders. But the explosion had not been useless. It led to the settlement after months of delicate negotiation by provincial officers, involving over fifty meetings, of an ancient quarrel which might have remained to plague the emerging national leadership. It

convinced some of these new leaders, also, of the need to channel and direct the local patriot isms which began to be expressed.

What the settlement could not do was to provide a pattern for the solution of numerous other suzerainty issues, pressing and explosive enough to be referred to the Commissioner and the civil Secretary in 1952 and 1953. They concluded that the real solution would come with 'the introduction of local government and the effluxion of time'. The Resident was less sanguine.

In Wum Division, hauled together by the combination of disparate units, there were troubles of a different kind. The proceedings of the Wum Divisional Council reflected the unequal development of an area at the dead end of a south-facing system of communications. The first motor-car reached the divisional headquarters in 1949 and the main centres of population were only linked by motorable roads in 1953. It was believed that some parts of the new Division had not received more than twenty administrative visits since 1917. Its backwardness was exemplified by a low rate of literacy--about 2 percent compared with about 10 percent for the whole southern trust territory and a high rate of yaws infection--incidences of 60 percent were recorded in 1950 from two areas. In two of the more important centres, Wum town and the chiefdom of Kom, internal feuds grumbled on, preventing any effective contact between the minority of educated men and the traditional authorities. If the new Division was to catch up with its southern neighbours a large enough provincial staff to man the station continuously and tour it constantly was essential. While the main tasks of tax collection remained in the hands of village heads and elders, it was necessary to attend to their troubles and secure their co-operation. Some, in the course of the reform of Native Courts had lost sitting fees; others, in the course of the reorganization of the so-called Clan Councils which replaced former Native Authorities, had lost their seats. They were, for the most part, disgruntled. The Clan Councils themselves were without a legal basis or defined functions. For the first two or three years of its existence the Divisional Council showed few signs of life, but in its third, under the influence of a few energetic men, it pressed a demand for free junior primary education. Some Clan Areas were prepared to pay an education rate. The demand, welcome as it was as a sign of vitality, presented unrealized difficulties in execution. The education rates imposed were accompanied by a rise in general tax rates, and a rise in prices absorbed much of the new revenues. Almost half of divisional revenues were provided by the *jangali* paid by transhumant Fulani graziers whose entry had been encouraged by Divisional Officers looking for means of balancing Native Authority budgets. Their entry in even larger numbers was accompanied by justified complaints

by women of crop damage to their farms—a longstanding grievance—and provoked the revival of women's societies and regulatory devices in some areas. These difficulties were intermittently tackled but the new Division was not continuously staffed, and its officers, unsupported by Cameroonian cadets, often over-extended, and too frequently transferred, were unable to arrest the growth of particular grievances or the circulation of rumours. These erupted in the form of tax-collectors' strikes and a women's uprising after the Southern Cameroons had achieved a large measure of local autonomy.⁸¹

The separation of the Southern Cameroons from the Eastern Region provided a platform which united both nationalist and traditionalist opinion in support of a new political formation, the Kamerun National Congress, which absorbed the KUNC, and members of the CNF and other bodies; it was created after the Southern Cameroons bloc broke with the NCNC in March 1953. The KNC delegation obtained agreement in principle in 1953, 'subject to fiscal inquiry and the result of elections, to a separate legislature and executive, and after the resumed constitutional congress in 1954 to 'quasi-federal' status for the Southern Cameroons as an insurance against premature independence as a minority within Nigeria. The 1953 elections, contested by the KNC and the KPP, allies of the NCNC, were fought on this issue without any specific statements about government structure. In subsequent negotiations with officials the KNC had agreed that the office of Resident in Bamenda, now seemingly anomalous as well as expensive, should be abolished.

The reaction of most of the Federal Native Authorities to this proposal in Bamenda was strong, and an embarrassment to the provincial staff. The arrival of a Resident was associated with many miles of new trunk road, more new primary schools and dispensaries, adult education projects, touring medical teams, the encouragement of coffee production and co-operatives, and the first whiffs of prosperity, at least for those near the roads. The Wum Native Authority accused the politicians of 'driving them back to bush'. The south-Eastern Federal Native Authority passed a resolution that: "on account of the complicated traditional set-up blended with democratic modernization, prejudices arising from lack of know-how and inability to consolidate the old and the new for the purpose of political advancement, Bamenda requires a strong and competent administrative guide...a fatherly type of man ... to serve as an immediate and handy adviser on all matters arising abruptly among the people.⁸² These views could not be dismissed as those of indolent councillors: they were adopted by the provincial council of the KNC, and a compromise, the posting of a Resident, Special Duties, was

arrived at. The bigger chiefs had joined in the fray, the more violently since they believed that the Assemblymen had let them down in the matter of the House of Chiefs they were expected to press at the constitutional conference in Lagos and after. They formed themselves into an influential lobby, the Conference of Chiefs and Natural Rulers. Some European administrators (not those in Bamenda) thought that their agitation was a parochial one which would die down as soon as the hybrid Native Authorities were transformed into wholly elected bodies and direct elections called. The nationalist politicians, on the whole, did not agree: a resolution in favour of a House of Chiefs was passed at the first session of the House of Assembly, moved by the future Vice-President of the reunited Cameroons, the Honourable John Ngu Foncha.

For the next few years Bamenda politics remained centred on the 'traditional set-up blended with democratic modernization'. Native Authority elections were introduced, the first in the homogeneous Bali Native Authority in 1955. But despite elections the ghosts of the old chiefdom Native Authorities, now transformed into advisory local councils, refused to be laid.⁸³ The expatriate divisional staff removed themselves increasingly from council meetings. But as they did so, without locally-recruited Divisional Officers to replace them as yet, new lines of communication with authority were sought, openly or covertly, by chiefs and councillors. Local disputes with a customary flavour, formerly the Divisional Officers' recognized sphere of activity, increasingly attracted the intervention of national party agents, and even played some part in local elections. It could scarcely be otherwise. These matters were, after all, still a centre of political interest for the majority of villagers.

It seemed that the Resident had been right, in 1953, in thinking that elective local government would provide no means of solving problems centring on the nature of chiefly authority and the interests and identities it represented: these would always demand the intervention of the executive. For some Cameroon ministers and opposition leaders these problems did not merely involve the restoration of good feeling but finding some means of harnessing an old legitimacy to a new state.

Acknowledgement

The Editors are grateful to the copyright holders, the publishers B.H. Blackwell of Oxford, for permission to reproduce this paper, which first

appeared in Kenneth Robinson and Frederick Madden, eds., *Essays in Imperial Government, presented to Margery Perham*, 1963, pp.89-139. The footnotes have been a little revised, chiefly to include some references to later retrospective literature, and to omit references to the careers of Colonial Service officers mentioned in the text. Otherwise the text is largely identical with the paper published in 1963.

Endnotes

1. Margery Perham, *Lugard: the Years of Authority* (London 1960), p.545.

2. Recent literature on regional and long-distance trade and new sources of information have been magisterially put together in J.-P. Warnier, *Echanges, developpement et hierarchies dans le Bamenda pre-Colonial* (Stuttgart, 1985). See also Paul Nchoji Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy* (Yaounde, 1989) for additional detail.

3. *Amtsblatt für das Schutzgebiet Kamerun* (1912), 200.

4. The German *Bezirk* included Bamum and parts of the Bamileke region, later included in the French mandated area, Kentu and western Gashaka, later administered by the British as parts of the provinces of Benue and Adamawa. For a discussion of political and administrative boundaries see J.R. Prescott, 'Les regions politiques des Camerouns Anglo-Français', *Ann. Geog.* (Paris), lxxviii (1959), 263-7, J.C. Anene, 'The Nigerian-Southern Cameroons Boundary', *J. Hist. Soc. Nigeria*, ii (1962), 186-195, and for the diplomatic background J.C. Anene, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria* (Ibadan History Series, London, 1970). The German administrative boundaries are best followed in Max Moisel, *Karte von Kamerun* (Berlin, 1913) 1:300,000 Sheets EI., 'E2, F1, F2. Much of the toponymy is Bali. For further references and discussion of local reactions see Verkijika G. Fanson's Yaounde doctoral thesis: 'Trans-frontier relations and Resistance to Cameroun-Nigeria colonial boundaries 1916-1945' (1982).

5. See Harry R. Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons, 1884-1914* (London, 1938), pp.316-7.

6. See F. Thorbecke, *Im Hochland von Mittel-Kamerun*, ii (Hamburg, 1916), p.75ff for the competition between the British-supported Hausa trade from

the Benue and the German firms. The kola trade remained largely in local hands.

7. Directions to stations on methods of tax-collection are contained in 'Bekanntmachung des Gouverneurs zur Ausführung der Steuerverordnungen', *Amtsblatt* (1909), 55-6.

8. The establishment and early development of the missions are described by Wilhelm Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815-1915* (Basel, 1916), 279ff, Jaap van Slageren, *Les origines de l'église evangelique du Cameroun* (Leiden, 1972), pp.74-124, and Pater Joh. Emonts SCJ, *Ins steppen- und Bergland Inn erkameruns*, 2nd edn (Aachen, 1927) *passim*. Official German education policy is dealt with by M. Schlunk, *Die Schulen für Eingeborene in den deutschen Schutzgebieten* (Hamburg, 1914), p.59ff. More recent publications include Fr. R.J. O'Neil, *Mission to the British Cameroons* (Mill Hill, 1991) and Charles W. Weber, *International Influences and Baptist Mission in west Cameroon*, Leiden, 1993.

9. Hesse, 'Eingeborenenschiedsgerichte in Kamerun', *Kolonial-Zeitung* (1896) p.299ff., and Winkelmann, 'Die Eingeborenenrechtspflege in Deutsch Ostafrika, Kamerun und Togo', *z. vgl. Rechtswissenschaft*, liii, 189ff.

10. A characteristic feature of traditional political organization in the greater part of Bamenda and adjacent areas was the regulatory society, a closed male association controlled by and often controlling the chief. It had police and, frequently, magico-religious, apotropaic, inquisitorial and punitive functions and was usually closed to princes whose ambitions it checked. See P.M. Kaberry, 'Retainers and Royal Households in the Cameroons Grassfields', *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, III-II (10), 1962, Chilver and Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda* (Buea, 1968) *passim*, Nkwi and Warnier, *History of the Western Grassfields* (Yaounde, 1982), and for Nso', Chem Langhee, Fanzo and Chilver, 'Nto' Nso' and its occupants', *Paideuma*, 31, 1985, pp.151-181. Other papers in *Paideuma* 31 are germane to the understanding of this complex institution, aptly compared in its structure to a set of Chinese puzzle boxes, but highly variable in its general mode of recruitment, that of its sub-sets, and its powers to depose or admonish chiefs.

11. See Arnold Ruger in H. Stoecker (ed.), *Kamerun unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, Vol.I (Berlin, 1960), p.¹⁹⁷i the official estimate of Bafut

casualties here quoted was 1,062. In addition over 600 prisoners and penal labourers were taken during the first punitive expedition.

12. For a list of punitive expeditions between the end of 1904 and the beginning of 1907 see *Amtsblatt* (1909), 1. The dates of expeditions and patrols, not all punitive, can be picked up from Moisel's map sheets, 1913.

13. IC51n: Military Station to Imperial Government (half-yearly Report), 2 October 1908, a special report from the Station Commander dated Duala, 7 May 1909, and an historical appendix to the annual station report for 1910/11 dated 21 June 1911. For a summary of the Bali case see Chilver, 'Paramountcy and Protection: the Bali and the Germans' in Gifford and Louis (eds.) *Britain and Germany in Africa* (New Haven, 1967).

14. Governor Kamerun to Imperial Military station Bamenda (copied to Banyo) Buea, 10 July 1912.

15. Annual Report of the Imperial Military station, Bamenda, 1 April 1913 to 31 March 1914. The rounding up of labourers was often carried out by *basoge*, armed retainers maintained by the bigger chiefs with official knowledge: naturally enough former slaves and subjected minorities were the first to go. For a brief account of chiefly roles in tax collection and recruitment under the German regime, viewed from a local standpoint, see E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, 'Traditional Government in Bafut', *Nigerian Field* 28(1) 1962.

16. Governor Kamerun to Imperial Military station, Bamenda, Buea 27 October 1912; Governor Kamerun to Secretary of State, Reichskolonialamt, No.390, dispatched simultaneously.

17. In contrast to some Residents of German Adamawa, Hptm. Strumpell in particular, and the civil administrator of the neighbouring Ossidinge *Bezirk*, Dr Alfred Mansfeld, who was prepared to use the Ngbe regulatory society as an auxiliary instrument of government, cf. his *Urwald-Dokumente* (Berlin, 1908), pp.160-161.

18. Eberhard von Vietsch, *Wilhelm solf* (Tubingen, 1961), pp.369-370. By this time Lugard himself had begun to doubt the transformation of his administrative methods by his followers. See Mary Bull, 'Indirect Rule in

Northern Nigeria, 1906-1911' in Robinson and Madden (eds.) *Essays in Imperial Government* (Oxford, 1963), pp.47-87.

19. F.J. Moberly, *Official History of the War: Military Operations, Togoland and Cameroons*. 1914-18 (London, 1931), pp.340ff.; Erich Student, *Kamerun's Kampf*. 1914-1916 (Berlin, 1942), pp.45ff. and 278ff.

20. H. Martin (ed.), *Histoire et coutumes de Bamum redigees sous la direction du sultan Njoya* (Duala, 1952), p.215. This did not prevent a German raid on Bali-Nyonga, where a British supply depot had been temporarily established, as Student records.

21. Bamenda Station diary, January to March 1916.

22. *Proclamation* issued by General Dobell, No.10 of 17 March 1916; *Proclamations issued by the Governor-General relating to the British sphere*, B. 2027/1624 of 2 April 1916 and B. 1094/1610 of 10 June 1916. Podevin's previous experience had been in the northern districts of the Southern Provinces.

23. For the subsequent transfer and administrative vicissitudes of Kentu and Gashaka see A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Adamawa, Past and Present*, (London, 1958), p.82.

24. *Report on the British Sphere of the Cameroons*, (1922) p.35; Imperial Military station Bamenda to Imperial Govt. Kamerun, 20 June 1913. Of the estimated population, over 82,000 were ascribed to Bamum, Podevin to Resident, 25 May 1916.

25. Bamenda Division: Reports upon labour supplied to the Plantations in 1916; Depositions by Va tung and others of Kumbo, 15 November 1916 (Buea Archives); Quarterly and Annual Divisional Reports, 1916 and 1917 (Bamenda papers); Bamenda station Diary, 1916, 1917, *passim*.

26. Resident to Sec. Southern Provinces, 5 December 1916.

27. For an account of the epidemic see G. Martin, *L'Existence au Cameroun*, (Paris, 1921), pp. 125-162.

28. I am indebted for this information to the late Mr Max Fohtung, court clerk for Bali at the time.

29. Annual Report, Bamenda Division, for the year ending 31 December 1919 (Bamenda papers); Quarterly reports from Bagam patrols (Bamenda papers); Bamenda station Diary, February to December 1919.

30. Hitherto the only substantial accounts of local political organization received were from Lt L.W.G. Malcolm, in charge of the Bagam patrol. The material collected by him was subsequently published in learned journals, and is listed in M. McCulloch, M. Manoukian and I. Dugast. *Peoples of the Central Cameroons*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa (London, 1954), pp.52-4.

31. The Nigerian civil Service had been depleted by a third in 1917, Colonial Annual Reports, No. 1030, *Nigeria*, 1917, p.24.

32. Report on the Bamenda Division, 1920; Report supplementary to the preceding with accompanying minutes and correspondence, 1920; Memorandum, Resident to DO, Bamenda, 15 April 1921 (Bamenda papers).

33. U. Fitzherbert Ruxton (1873-1954) CMG, became Lt Governor, Southern Provinces, 1925-9. The author of a handbook on Maliki Law, he has been described as one of Lugard's 'intellectual soldiers'.

34. Memorandum by N.C. Duncan covering Annual Report, Bamenda Division, 1920 (Bamenda papers). The myth of Hamitic influence was widely held at this period, the theory being that evidences of a higher civilization among Black peoples could not be due to themselves but must be imported: it reflects an old racist stereotype, notwithstanding which this now discredited view has been supported by some African writers.

35. Despite instructions from the Imperial Government, the German poll-tax had never been more than a district quota, revised from time to time by a count of heads and roughly adjusted according to trading activity to judge from accounts collected by Dr Kaberry and myself from elderly notables.

36. Provincial Report, 1921; Memoranda, DO, Bamenda, to Resident, 13 and 19 January 1922; Resident to Do, Bamenda, 25 January 1922 and 17 February 1922; 'Report on Native Institutions', DO to Resident, 24 January 1922 (Bamenda papers).

37. Permanent Mandates Commission, *Proceedings*, 7th Session, 5th Mtg, 21 October 1925. Lugard's question reflects the rather contradictory proposals of the Grier (1922) and Tomlinson (1923) reports on Native Administration in the South-Eastern provinces, discussed by Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, (London, 1937), pp.201-3.

38. *Ibid.*, 6th Meeting. The rights of recognized Native Authorities to sue tax defaulters and village corvée defaulters for refusal to obey authority were laid down in the Native Revenue and Native Authority Ordinances. They had also been covered by local German legislation.

39. An administrative officer's description of work in the Mamfe and Bamenda Divisions, 1921-1925, is to be found in Sir Bryan Sharwood-Smith's *But always as Friends*, (London, 1969), Chapters 1 and 2.

40. For a critique of the system see *Report of the Commission on Revenue Allocation*, (Lagos, 1951), p.122ff.

41. The only Cameroons Assessment to be published is B.G. Stone, *Assessment Report, Victoria Division*, 1931; a Bamenda Assessment of 1934 was circulated to members of the Permanent Mandates Commission. They can be consulted in the National Archives Buea.

42. Mbo Assessment Report: SSP 11112/23, and accompanying Minutes by Sir Hugh Clifford, captain Buchanan-Smith, W.E. Hunt and others. November, 1923 (Buea Archives).

43. See P.M. Kaberry, 'Traditional Politics in Nsaw', *Africa*, xxix (1959) 366-83; P.M. Kaberry and E.M. Chilver, 'The Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga', *Africa*, xxxi (1961), pp.355-71; F. Carpenter: Report on Kwifon, 1936; B. (later Sir Bryan) Sharwood-Smith, Assessment Report on the Ngemba- and Mogamaw-speaking families, 1925; E.G. (later Sir Gerald) Hawkesworth, 'Notes on Clans in the Wum area', n.d. 1926? and other reports listed in McCulloch, Manoukian and Dugast, *op.cit.* Modern monographs include C. Geary, *We: die Genese eines Hauptlingtums*, (Wiesbaden, 1976), P.N. Nkwi, *Traditional Government and Social Change*, (Fribourg, 1976), and theses and papers by e.g. R.G. Dillon (Meta'), B. Masquelier (Ide), V. Baeke (Mfumte), M. Goheen (Nso'), R. Engard (Bafut), J-P Warnier (Mankon), S. Diduk (Kedjom), H-J Koloss (Oku) and Ian Fowler (Babungo).

44. Bamenda station Diary, March 1920.

45. C.J. Gregg, Assessment Report on the Meta Clan, 1923; Annual Report, Bamenda Division, 1925 (Bamenda papers).

46. C.H. Croasdale, Intelligence Report on the Menemo-speaking families, 1933; Supplement thereto by V.K. Johnston, 23 December 1935 (Bamenda papers).

47. Papers relating to Nsungli Clan Assessment, 1923; Kaka-Ntem Assessment, 1932; Intelligence Report on Mbaw, Mbem and Mfumte areas, 1933; Nsungli Area Intelligence Report, 1934; Divisional Annual Reports, 1933 and 1934; Tour Notes, 1933 and 1934 (Bamenda papers). The claims of Ntem, and the political use of genealogies, have been discussed by M.D.W. Jeffreys, 'Some historical notes on the Ntem', *J. Hist. Soc. Nigeria*, ii (1962), 260-76.

48. Tour Notes, 1934, 1935; Nsungli Area Progress Report, 1936.

49. 'Kommandeur', usually Hauptmann Hans Glauning, Hptm. Adametz and Mr E.G. (later Sir Gerald) Hawkesworth, (ob. 1949) one of the best remembered Divisional Officers of the 'twenties; subsequently Governor of British Honduras.

50. C.K. Meek's Introduction to *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (London, 1937) lucidly expresses the new outlook. See also *Annual Report, Southern Provinces for the year 1932* (Lagos, 1933), pp.2-3.

51. John P. Jordan C.S.Sp, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, (Dublin, 1949), pp.170-72. Joh. Emonts, SCJ, *op.cit.*, pp.403ff. Father Shanahan's visit was supported by Lugard who made a donation towards it. It was evidently hoped that the Holy Ghost Fathers, whose work in Eastern Nigeria had earned the admiration of British officers, would take over the work of the SCJ in Bamenda.

52. See also *Evangelische Heidenbote* (1927), 100, and MS 'The History of Faay Sov' by Banafty, assisted by L.S. Fonka (1960). Administrative officers argued that the freedom of religion required by the terms of the Mandate extended to 'natural religions' if not repugnant and was not confined to 'Religions of the Book'.

53. B.T. Sakah, 'The Influence of western Civilization on the Nso', roneo, 1962.

54. See Margery Perham, *Native Administration*, pp.329-31.

55. From the mid-'twenties onwards, the Fathers would usually dispatch the royal runaways and their Christian partners to a more distant mission, a practice which mollified the chiefs.

56. By the time the Nigerian Marriage Ordinance was applied, the demand of local Christians for it was lukewarm. See the discussion of the question at the 26th Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission, 3rd Meeting. A survey of over 600 Nso' marriages in the mid-'forties by Kaberry indicates, however, that the escape of girls to preferred partners and the desertion of husbands was no new thing, due solely to mission influence, to which it was often ascribed by angry traditionalists. About half of the irregular first-time unions she recorded, runaway church marriages included, were later regularized traditionally by formal gifts to and reconciliation with marriage-guardians. But divorce and remarriage with return of bride price, customarily available in other areas, was not open to most converted spouses in Nso' given their different form of preferred customary non-royal marriage. Bride-price marriage, usually to strangers, and concubinage with rights *in uxorem* only were also tolerated. By the 'forties Nso' Christians had adjusted themselves discreetly to European missionary and administrative misunderstandings while traditionalists became far less exacting in their wardship and bride-service claims.

57. In 1929 some chiefs' retainers were recognized as *dogarai* or chiefdom police, cf. *Annual Report, Southern Provinces*, (Lagos, 1929), p.17.

58. cf. Emonts, *op.cit.*, 407, Letter from Revd Fr Jacobs to Revd Fr Emonts, 10 April 1926; Reports on Bikom Chiefship, DO to Resident, 9 November 1926 and Resident to DO, 25 November 1926.

59. *Evangelische Heidenbote*, 1921, p.136, and several references in J. van slageren, *Les origines de l'Eglise evangelique au Cameroun* (Leiden 1972).

60. For an account of the accommodation of a Basel congregation in a small chiefdom, Nsei, see A. Schmidt, *Die rote Lendenschnur* (Berlin, 1955), *passim*.

61. Resident Ruxton was active in promoting Native Administration schools and the Cameroons Province pioneered them in the South.

62. The Intelligence Reports on which Native Authority reorganizations were based demanded a period of 4-6 weeks' fieldwork in a small area. (Southern Provinces Circular SP 6752/96 of 23 February 1932, and a Provincial Circular of 23 January 1934.)

63. In 1938 Bamenda and Nso' Native Treasury revenue amounted to £6,800; £5,000 of reserves of about £6,500 were earmarked for road construction outside the Division, but providing it eventually with outlets.

64. *Annual Report, Southern Provinces* (Lagos, 1938), pp.30-31.

65. The only at all reliable population figures up to 1954 are those of the 1953 Census which records the total population of Bamenda (then a Province with three Divisions) as 429,038.

66. cf. Nigerian Leg. Co. *Sessional Paper No.24* of 1945.

67. The annual report to the League of Nations in 1936 had stated: 'The question of the natives getting the full benefit of the trade revival is one of economics and it is difficult to see what useful measure the Administration can take to ensure it.' (p.72).

68. For its interpretation see: *The apportionment of duties between the Government of Nigeria and the Native Administrations: Statement of Policy* (Lagos, 1947).

69. E.J. Gibbons, *African Local Government Reform: Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria* (Lagos, 1949); *Report of a Select committee* (Enugu, 1948). The theory of inherent authority in its modified form had been clearly restated by Sir Bernard Bourdillon in *The apportionment of revenue and duties between the Central Government and Native Administrations* (Lagos, 1939), pp.4-5.

70. GN NO.1453 of 1950; *Report on the Native Courts (Cameroons and Bamenda Provinces)* Commission of Inquiry (Lagos, 1953).

71. Minutes and correspondence with Resident, 7 June 1948 to 21 January 1949, NA.2502 (Bamenda papers).

72. The method of handling of complaints and petitions was prescribed in provincial circulars and might involve the divisional staff in prolonged inquiries, to judge by instructions issued in the 'thirties: Circular Residents' Instructions Nos.45 and 47, 1933, and NO.67 of 1934 (Bamenda papers).

73. For the formation and leadership of the CDCWU see W.A. Warmington, *A West African Trade Union*, (London, 1960), pp.22-36.

74. In 1951 an official inquiry into Cameroons land tenure systems was made by C.W. Rowling. Proposals for a simple cadastral survey and the codification of native law and custom as regards land tenure had been made in 1936 by Divisional Officers in Bamenda in answer to a circulated Governor's Minute on the subject: Memoranda by Dr M.D.W. Jeffreys and F.R. Kay, 1 October 1936 (Bamenda papers). There is a copy in the Rhodes House (Bodleian) Library, Oxford.

75. Resolutions taken at the Inaugural Conference of the CNF, Kumba, May 14th and 15th, 1949 (roneo).

76. UN Trusteeship Council, *Official Records*, Vol.2, Fourth Year, 6th Session, p.125.

77. For a discussion of the vicissitudes of local government in the Eastern Region between 1950 and 1955, see L. Gray Cowan, *Local Government in west Africa*, (New York, 1958), pp.69-75, 119-135, 161-3.

78. Some of these questions have been traced in Nso' in E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, 'From tribute to tax in a Tikar chiefdom', *Africa*, xxx (1960), 1-19.

79. Suits C/33/1950, C/55/1950, C/64/1950 and C/65/1950 (consolidated) in the High Court of Justice, Calabar.

80. *Nigeria Gazette Extraordinary* No.37, Vol.40, 1953; UN Petitions T/Pet 4/82 and others.

81. Wum Divisional Reports, 1957, 1958; the women's movement was later said to be canalized by local organizers into an agitation against the KNC, according to R.E. Ritzenthaler, 'Anlu: a women's uprising in the Cameroons', *African studies*, xxix, 3 (1960). For different perceptions concerning it see P.N. Nkwi, 'Traditional female militancy in a modern context' in J-C. Barbier (ed.), *Femmes du Cameroun*, (Paris, 1985), Eugenia Shanklin, 'Anlu Remembered: the Kom women's rebellion of 1958-1961', in *Dialectical Anthropology*, 15 (1990), and Verena Westermann, *Women's Disturbances: Der Anlu-Aufstand bei den Kom (Kamerun) 1958-1960*, (Hamburg, 1992). See also an unpublished report by P.M. Kaberry to the Commissioner on farmer-grazier problems in Nso' (Buea Archives, 1959) for the situation in another area, with a different outcome.

82. SEFNA Memorandum, 16 September 1954.

83. united Nations Visiting Mission to the Trust Territories of the Cameroons, *Report* (1956), p.13.

A Girl Growing Up In Nso': 1940-1943

JEDIDA ASHERI

After Christmas in 1940, my mother said that I should get a small plot at the Mission and learn farming. Before this I used to go to farm with her but she said that she did not like my method of farming. I had not learnt the correct way. She gave me a fairly big plot near the ruins of our old house. It was about one hundred and twenty feet by sixty feet. I was glad to have a farm plot of my own.

I had owned a very small plot near the old house when I was about nine years of age. Patrick had one too, quite close to mine. But we were small and could not till the gardens. Mamma prepared both and planted corn on them. One morning, while she was away at Mass, we started to fight. Patrick beat me and I ran into his garden and began breaking down the maize plants which were then in flower. Patrick rushed into my plot and did the same. Before this thoughtless destruction was stopped, we had done great damage to the crops. Of course, I got a beating from Mamma. Patrick was everyone's pet, except Papa's and mine. Since that time Mamma had not farmed any plots in my name.

One Monday Mamma gave me a hoe and I took a basket in which I put a small calabash of water, after the custom of Nso' women going to farm. I put the basket on my head, and carried my hoe on my back according to native custom. My new plot had been lying fallow for two years so the elephant grass was overgrown. Last year's elephant stems lay dry under the year's growth. The grass was brown and parched from the scorching of the dry-season sun. I was to root out all the grass and leave it to dry off completely. This was not an easy task, but I had seen it done by other people.

As soon as I arrived, I started rooting out the grass-and cleaning around the plot. I started from the lower part and worked up the gentle slope. I had only done one fifth of it when I felt a sharp pain in my back, low down in my spine. I tried to stand up but it was not possible. Then I tried to sit down; this also I found difficult. I lay down flat on my back and rolled from side to side. There was no one to help me or tell me what to do. Luckily the pain began to ease off. As soon as I could I crept to where I had left the calabash of water and drank some. Then I sat under a banana tree for a long time.

When I was sufficiently recovered, at about four o'clock, I went home. This was unusual because women came home late from the farm. But Mamma had told me that whatever I did, it was my business to see that there was corn-flour in the house always. I came home early in order to get this foofoo corn ready and to fetch water.

The next day I went to "my farm", as I began to call the plot, and determined to finish what I had not done the previous day. I worked very hard, almost without break till midday. At sunset I had rooted up all the tall grass and cleaned around. The farm was taking shape. I made a small fire with dry grass, as I had seen Mamma do, and roasted some yams. I ate some and took some home to Selina and Patrick and my other brother and sister.

I had finished the first major job on the farm. I went back the third day to begin the next stage. This was putting the dry grass into heaps and keeping these heaps in position by putting slabs of earth on them. The hoes cut out these slabs in the desired shape. I gathered the grass into heaps, taking care to leave good spaces between them. I did not put the heaps in rows. Having done this to the middle of the plot, I decided to experiment with putting earth on the grass. This was more enjoyable than heaping the grass. After I had put earth on all the heaps, the section looked very tidy, and like the farms I had seen my mother cultivate.

What about trying the next step? I went to the nearest house and brought fire which I carefully set to the first three heaps where the grass was now very dry. What a success! The grass burnt easily under the earth, and the earth began to smoulder. At this juncture, two women came that way. They were both my relations. At first they just stood and talked to themselves, quite audibly though. They said I had acquired my mother's skill in farming. Then they called me "Asheri" and congratulated me in a very emotional manner. They urged me to carry on in the same way. Other women came along and made similar remarks. I went home that afternoon satisfied with myself. At home I told Mamma how far I had gone. She said I should finish quickly and then help her on her big farms.

On the fourth day I went to finish all my heaps. I was just putting the last touches to them when some schoolgirls came to see me at the farm. They said that Sister had sent them to me with a message. The message was that I should come to the Convent the following morning. That afternoon I left my farm sadly because I imagined that sister might have work for me. I went to the Convent as I was told, but sister told me that I would have to wait for a fortnight before I would be told what to do.

I had to go to the Convent and find out why the sisters wanted me. Mother, the head of all the Sisters, spoke to me. She explained that she

wished to ask me if I would accept a job teaching in their school. The school had not received a Government grant yet so it would be impossible to pay me a regular salary. She said she was going to give me four shillings a month and would feed me, if I accepted. I told her that I would go and tell Papa what she had said.

On reaching home I told Papa what Mother had proposed. He said it was very good. He said everything the sisters and Fathers said was the best for me. He told me strictly to obey them always and never to doubt their word. Then he said I should pack my clothes and go at once. So once more I went to the Convent to stay.

On Monday I went to teach. I was given two classes, Standards I and II. Sister arranged afternoon classes for me in order to teach me methods and how to write notes of lessons. I was very bored and did not want to start learning again after finishing in the primary school. I could remember how I was taught and the methods which were the best. I had been beaten when I could not remember my lessons, so I had had to cram most of my work. I therefore now beat the girls who failed to remember what I taught them. I beat all the girls who had mistakes in dictation and in mental arithmetic.

It was unfortunate that I had a sister in Standard I. She got the worst of it. She began to dislike school and as she was not naturally bright she became very backward in class. At the end of the year the sisters advised Papa to take Selina out of school, and concentrate on his other children. Papa took her and she became Mamma's companion, and worked with her always. I have since discovered that I was the cause of her not being educated and I have tried to make her happy by giving her many of her needs.

I was not happy with my job. Sister made me write ten notes of lessons a week because the Education Code said a teacher must write at least five notes a week for his class. I spent most of my Thursday afternoons trying to write these wretched notes, in order to give them to Sister on Friday for marking. I became very dissatisfied and thought of a way out.

Majela, Catherine, and Emerentia, the Novices we had lived with when we first went to the Convent, had all gone to Dschang, to a Convent there. They could become sisters at Dschang but at Nso' they had been told that it was not possible for them to become sisters. I now fancied I would go to Dschang and become a Sister, though there were Novices at the Convent where I lived. In this way I thought I would escape from all sorts of hard work and above all from teaching.

One afternoon I made up my mind to go and tell Papa what I had decided to do. He had by this time retired from teaching catechism in the Mission. I found him sitting in front of the house and told him that I had

come to tell him something. Papa told me to go into the house. He came in and sat by the table, near the wall. I began but could not find the words to express myself. He was patient and encouraged me to speak. Then I blurted out that I wanted to be a sister.

‘And why are you going to be a sister?’ he asked.

I said I liked it. To this he said nothing but simply stood up and went out. I felt foolish.

He called one of his junior brothers, by name Richard, and ordered him to come. In less than three minutes Richard was there. Papa told him to sit down. Then he told me to repeat what I had said so that Pa Richard could also hear it. I found it difficult to repeat it. Papa said he would help me, and went on to tell Pa Richard what I had said. After that he laughed. His brother merely said ‘True, Jedida?’ When Papa had finished laughing he said he had called Richard to be a witness. He said what I was proposing was not what I really desired to do. He said I was finding a way of escape from work. This was strange because I had not explained to him that I now disliked teaching. He told me that if I disliked work and chose sisterhood, it would be worse for me. Sisters worked hard, he said, and if I was deceived by the Novices that the work was easy, I had better go back and reconsider my plan. He warned me that I was not fit to be a Sister.

After this warning Papa proceeded to outline my duty to the family. He said I was his first child and he had five of us. It was going to be my duty to educate others of my family as he had educated me. If I wanted to be a Sister, I would have to wait till this work was done, as he was getting old and had no energy for trade. He then ordered me to go back to the Convent.

I did not really feel disappointed. It dawned on me like daylight that I really had not meant to become a sister. I felt very light as I walked back to Shisong. Thecla joined me. Half way to the Convent I invited her to sit down on the grass and hear a story. I repeated what had happened and told her that I would never make the mistake again of saying I wished to enter the Convent. We laughed over it.

I went on with my difficult work. I had no confidence in myself and did not feel that I could fittingly be called ‘Teacher’. In those days teachers were respected and they were the most civilized people in town. They had more clothes than anybody else and wore shoes and hats. I could not afford more than two dresses, not to mention shoes.

Strange changes had taken place in my home and my parents were now poor. Patrick went to school in rags. One day I met him on his way to Shisong looking like a lost child. So very ragged he was that my heart sank

within me. I had not seen him for about two weeks. I felt anger rising in my heart against Papa. I thought he was getting negligent.

I made a quick calculation and told Patrick to come at once with me to see Papa. I was now bold and serious. I walked into my father with a firm step and started at once with 'Just look at this child' I was already crying. I asked him why he should leave Patrick like this, and pointed out how unfair it was. He was always expecting this child to pass his examinations. I asked him how Patrick could concentrate with those rags on. Papa heard all this in silence.

I have said he was now poor, but he had still a little to depend on. He had his machine and sold a few pieces of cloth on market days. I felt he hadn't the same soft spot for Patrick as he had for me. He accused Patrick of rough-handling his clothes, but said he would see about a shirt for him on the market day. When market day came he gave Patrick a singlet.

I walked back to Shisong with Patrick. We went to the Convent and I gave him my only blanket, the one the sisters had given me as a present. From that day I gave him food every evening just to make him happy.

Empire Day was a great occasion for all schoolchildren and their teachers, as is National Day nowadays. It was a day on which they showed off as they marched through the town to the big sports field. Now that I was really a teacher I would have to march by the children and not in line with them as I had done when I was teaching before. That year I had a pretty dress but no shoes and no good head-scarf. I borrowed them from my friends, because I had to look presentable. After all, I was the only lady teacher in all Nso' and in 1941.

We always went to Mass first thing, but on Empire Day we went to Mass all dressed and ready for the long two and a half mile march to Kimbo' Town. I was the last to come into the church, as always, because it was my duty to see that all the girls were there. I tried to go into the church wearing the plimsoles I had borrowed, but felt too shy. I took them off and left them behind on a window. After Mass the girls went down to join the boys. I put the plimsoles on and went with them but I was almost melting with shyness. I tried to hide myself so that no one would notice which was the teacher and which were the pupils. I had the most awful day and was glad when the sports and feasting were over. I came home with the plimsoles in my hand, not on my feet. Of course, such events only increased my dislike for teaching.

At last the year came to an end. I thought I would become a farmer like my mother if there was only teaching as a job.

When the holidays were over I went back to the Convent. It was a Saturday when I returned to begin preparing work for Monday. That very day an uncle came to see me and told me that he brought good news from Bamenda. Government wanted two girls for training as midwives. These girls would be trained in Lagos. He thought I should apply to go. I told him that my Papa would be the one to decide. He hurried home and told Papa the news. If Papa was moved by this news, it was from the fear that I might like the proposal. He came quickly to Shisong and told me that I was to take no notice of what my uncle had told me. The Government, he said, could keep their training for other girls. I had been brought up by the Missionaries and owed them a moral obligation, which was to listen to them. I had to listen. As I was not particularly keen on the idea, I made no objection. A few months later, two Nso' girls left for Lagos to train as nurses.

Meanwhile a sudden change took place. The following week the Reverend Father told me that I could go to work in the Convent Hospital if I was interested in nursing. I accepted this proposal without hesitation and moved at once into the dormitory for Novices. This was a happy escape from teaching which I disliked extremely.

The year I went into hospital was 1942 and I was eighteen years old. How I enjoyed the first week! There was another girl from the Vocational School assisting at the hospital, so we worked together. The morning attendance was quite small and by ten o'clock we had finished with the out-patients. There were many in-patients but I did not go into that section of the hospital for some time. As soon as the out-patients went away I began to tidy up. I put away the instruments and washed and disinfected the floor.

Every day, before Reverend Mother left the hospital for the Convent she gave me instructions on what I was to do for the rest of the day. This was weeding around the hospital and in the flower gardens. Sometimes I made new flower-beds and planted flowers. At other times I was instructed to assist the Novices in harvesting coffee in the coffee farm behind the hospital. All the same I had plenty of free time. I used to finish my duties for the day at about three o'clock. The rest of the day was free.

After one month, a girl named Emilia joined me in the hospital and I was happy to have a constant companion. We were moved into another house where we stayed alone. Soon after Emilia came certain things happened which changed my opinion of nursing for the worse.

One day a lady brought a child to the hospital whose arm had been badly scalded and Mother instructed me to get the bandages and this and that powder. She herself attended to the child. The next morning Mother told me to untie the bandage which by this time had become stuck to the baby's arm.

Honestly, I was scared when I saw the red flesh, and I was distressed at the pain this was giving to the poor little thing. I confessed to Mother that I could not get off the bandage, and she had to do it herself.

Soon after this a man was brought from a distant village, with a severe burn under the left thigh and leg. It was a frightful sight. This man had had the burn two days before he was taken to hospital. Mother did not let me do any work in connection with him for the first two days. On the third day, the man was very bad, he was dying. Mother instructed me to bring a kidney dish to her. While she was treating the burn, I tried to be bold and watched her. When I saw that maggots were falling off from the bandage I told Mother that I could not wait there. After this Mother made up her mind about me. She said I would not make a good nurse. Then she ordered me to go to the Maternity section and work there for as long as I was in the hospital, and I was both happy and relieved. Emilia remained in the main hospital.

Duty in the maternity ward could be heavy as well as light. On certain days we had four or five deliveries in the day time, and three or four in the night. This meant that we had no break from duty on certain days. On other days there were no deliveries at all and we had a good time. But, of course, Sister Janet, the sister in charge, gave us manual work in the compound. At first it was the cleaning of the maternity ward and sterilizing the equipment, as well as the preparation of new bandages and pads for the new baby's navel. Then this gradually extended to work in the Convent.

Maternity work was, by far, the most prominent feature of the Convent Hospital work. Women came from all over Bamenda to have their babies at the hospital. A number of huts had been built behind the hospital, all in the native fashion. Maybe these huts were designed to make the women feel at home, but they were smokey and dark, each with as many bamboo beds as could be fitted along the four walls. There were also several fireplaces. The women were expected to come and live in the huts a few days before the arrival of the baby. If a woman had had difficult deliveries before, she came in much earlier. The place was noisy and full of women always. Our hut was not far away.

When a woman was in labour and felt that she would soon have her baby, another woman came to call me or the other girl. We were always prompt in obeying these calls because the result of a small delay could be great damage. We admitted the woman in pain and, if it was in the daytime, went up to the Convent to call sister Janet. At night we were told which sister to call. Many times we had to come running down very fast because the baby was nearly born. One night, a few days after I came to work in the maternity

ward, my Mamma came in the night and had a baby boy, Cassian, her sixth child. I only saw her in the morning, as I was not called. And wasn't I happy!

It was not always sunshine in the maternity ward, as I have already said. Some days we had very bad cases, and there was no doctor for them. It was during the war, and there was only one doctor in the whole of the Bamenda area. The sisters had to do all sorts of work which was really work for a doctor. Sometimes we waited near a lady for three or four days and nights. There were no anaesthetics to give the women, and some serious operations were done on women when they were wide awake. And they did not die! I witnessed several forceps deliveries, but no chloroform was given to the mothers. Some of these babies died of course, and the unfortunate women were ill for several months. The sisters had been extending my duties from the hospital to the Convent, because sometimes no babies were born for about three days. I worked in the chapel, in the kitchen and around the Convent. In the chapel I cleaned and polished the pews, the candlesticks and the glass in the windows. I also made curtains for the windows of the Convent reception room and for the chapel. Sometimes I did ironing in the reception room. When there was much cooking to be done for the Fathers, I helped in the kitchen. There was a time when I had the duty of taking lunch down to the Fathers, who lived about a mile away from the Convent.

At one time we had to clean the Father's house, all the twelve rooms of that big house, packed with boxes and furniture. Mother and I did the cleaning. We went down immediately after she had attended to the out-patients and came back a little before two in the afternoon. Mother was very strong and energetic then.

On arrival at the house we removed the furniture from the first room, swept it, washed and dried the floor, and then Mother replaced the furniture while I moved on to the second room to start work in it. I returned home each day as tired as a horse. The Fathers took no notice of this work and I did not see one of them offer to move a chair. They used to go away and come back when all was tidy.

In about July of that year, Emilia, who had been working in the hospital, left for Lagos to train as a nurse. I felt that it would be better if I went somewhere else as the work now seemed difficult for me. The Sisters worked hard, with little reward, and expected us to do the same. I had not received a single penny for all this work. I was a midwife in training' The Sisters allowed the big girls of the Vocational School to make small vegetable farms near the Convent spring, so they were very busy in the evenings making long beds in preparation for the planting season in March. I acquired a small plot and went down there whenever I was free. One evening, as I was busy on the

farm, a girl called and told me that the Father was waiting on the road to speak to me. I ran up to him and he told me that I was free to go back to school as a teacher. He said I would have the opportunity to train in Nigeria. I thanked him and told him that I was ready to take up teaching again.

Soon after this interview I went back to teach, and consequently moved from the hospital premises to the school compound. Once more I was back in the dormitory among schoolgirls.

By this time a new school house had been built. I taught Standards I and II, just as I had before going to the hospital. I was paid eight shillings a month, and this I gave to my Papa as I had done before. I felt happier now that I had tried nursing and found it difficult. Besides I was more grown up and had more confidence in myself.

Every Friday I went home for the weekend. At home I washed clothes for my parents and for the children. Then I ground some maize into flour, and left it behind in order to relieve my mother of the heavy work of caring for the family. The work had become so heavy that Mamma could not cope with it. There were six mouths to feed. One Saturday I took the children down to the stream, as I was accustomed to doing, to bathe them after I had finished washing their clothes. I was shocked when I took off the gown from the last but one little boy. He was all skin and bone. The rounded face was only a puffed swelling. I sank down near the child, weeping with a storm of anger. I grumbled that Papa and Mamma had neglected the child. I grumbled and said it was not fair. But in the evening when Mamma came home I could see that she was very tired and full of care.

Although we were very poor, my parents were not looking for undignified opportunities to make themselves more comfortable. My mother proved to be a woman of courage and determination. One Sunday, a number of men from the home of the man who wanted to marry me visited us. They brought some firewood. They had not told my parents they were coming. As soon as they came Mamma told them to wait until she had found food for them. She quickly prepared the foofoo and soup which she put in really big dishes which she took to them. After they had eaten she went to Papa's house to speak to them. All this time I had been in her kitchen with her. I tiptoed to the corner of the house where I could hear her.

In a grand manner she announced that she was glad to talk to them in the presence of my father. She said that she and her husband were truly poor and were unable to afford oil and salt for their soup. Then she stressed that in spite of this poverty, they were not going to sell their daughter for oil and salt. They preferred to remain poor. She said that she wanted them to understand that if ever I got married to anyone, she would only visit my

home because she loved me dearly and not because she wanted gifts. After this serious talk, which was heard in silence, she told them that she was not going to send them away with their firewood, but she would advise them not to bring more wood to her home. Instead, they should ask her where to take it and she would show them her senior sister, who was like her mother. She very politely told them that that was all she wanted to say. There were murmurs of approval from the men. Papa said, 'What Anna has said is all I would like to say'. I ran back into the kitchen so that I could watch the men going away from inside the dark room.

Mamma spoke to me when she returned from Papa's house. She said that although the man was a good man, she did not approve of the engagement. I felt happy because I did not like it myself. From now on, I was going to try to let him know how I felt. After all, there were several others whom Mamma might approve of! This was an error and I soon learnt that it was not easy for Mamma to approve of anyone.

A certain *Fon's* son became very fond of me. It was only admiration from a distance, but I knew that he wanted to marry me because he sent messages through girls from his own family and also through boys from my family. Two or three times, he sent me meat and ground-nuts which I accepted. One Saturday, as I was going up to the Hausa place to buy Hausa soap (I could not afford to buy real soap because I had only a few tenths of a penny) he gave me a shilling. I was frightened because we had been trained not to take presents from strangers. But the temptation to accept it was too strong, and so I took the shilling and bought soap and some native sweets for my sisters and brothers. It was a long piece of soap which I had to hide or else my mother would have wanted to know where I got it. That Saturday, I washed all the clothes clean and ironed some. I felt guilty all the time because I had not told my mother about the shilling. In the evening I went over to the Convent, taking my piece of soap with me.

The following Saturday, there was a great row in the evening.

The boy gave Selina, my sister, two half-pennies. She was excited and came running home with the money in her hand to show Mamma. No sooner had she shown it and told Mamma who had given it, than Mamma ordered her to take it back at once. Mamma began to rage, and said that the boy had many sisters to whom he could give money and, if he had given enough to all of them, he could go on to give some to his mother's sisters. Mamma said she would never accept presents from people such as that boy. I then understood that she would be opposed to the question of his marrying me. Accordingly, I sent a message to him telling him that he should not send me presents anymore-and that chapter was closed.

It was a very hard year for my family. Patrick had become very ill at Mamfe and was in hospital for a number of weeks. An uncle of mine who was returning from Calabar where he had gone to trade, happened to see him in the hospital. The boy was so ill that the man had to bring him home. It was a shock to see him so ill. He had almost died. But we were glad that he was brought back home. Slowly, very slowly, he recovered and went back to school at Shisong in the last term.

The only good luck we had was that papa's kola nut bush had borne plenty of fruit. In the months of October and November Papa was busy preparing the nuts for sale. He also arranged to have six men who would carry the heavy kola nut loads. His health had improved so he made ready to travel with them.

Before Papa went away, our school was visited by a Government Education Officer. During the visit he gave a test to some girls who wished to go to Nigeria and train as teachers. I took the test. It was a sudden announcement so I had made no preparation. But I was excited because I had a strong desire to go away somewhere. In the test we had to write a composition on "Why You Want To Be a Teacher". The points came to me easily, not because I liked teaching, but because I was bent on going away to a different place for a change. I am sure that I did the arithmetic very badly.

After the test I went to Church and prayed fervently, asking Our Lady to help me to get through the entrance examination. In fact, I kept a prayer in my heart the rest of that day. At home I told Papa about the test, and he said he was quite sure that I would pass. Before he left he told someone in the compound to give me some money if I was told to go to Calabar.

Papa left early in December, and I went to sleep in his house while he was away. A few days after he left we had our holidays. I was paid the usual eight shillings, and now that Papa was not at home to take it all, I bought an umbrella and a white material for a dress, which I made myself. I bought some palm oil for my mother, and some meat also. On Christmas Day we were happy. We hadn't beautiful clothes, but we ate a good meal. And I had an umbrella which made me very important and quite distinguished, though there was no rain!

Mamma seemed to realize that I was now a big girl. She did not check on when I came home in the evening. Of course, I went to the farm with her every day, but when I came back, I washed off the dust from my face and feet, and went to see my friends, mostly in the compound.

One night we stayed out late. It must have been twelve midnight when I came back to the house. The place was quiet. I knew that my mother would storm at me if she knew I was coming back so late. I tiptoed to Papa's house,

but as I was locking the door, it made a loud noise and awakened her. Honestly, her voice sounded like thunder as she called from her house. But I was safe behind the door. I did not answer, indeed, I smiled to myself. But what was I to do in the morning? I knew. First thing in the morning, I was off to Mass. By the time I came back her anger was spent. She only said ‘Asheri, you were late last night, and your food remained here in the kitchen’. I said I had eaten in my friend’s house, and she left it at that.

One evening, in the first week of January, I stood outside my Papa’s house, feeling really unhappy. I looked around. I grumbled at seeing the same people, the same house, the same trees every day. The next day was a market day. Mamma was ill, very ill, and I went to the market to see if I could find a hot ointment called “Aboki” to rub on her back. On my way up, the Fathers’ steward saw me and told me he had been sent to me. He gave me a pink piece of paper which he called a telegram. He said it had come from Bamenda. I read it and understood the part which said “Petronella and Jedida are successful”. I could not make out the meaning of the rest.

My excitement is better imagined than described. I told the boy that I was going over to the Mission right away to find out from Father what else the pink paper said.

I ran off to the market and bought the ointment. Then I ran back home and hurriedly told Mamma the news. She was so excited that she sat up and smiled. Then I rubbed the ointment on her back and went off to see the Father who explained that I was to leave the next day for Bamenda.

I came back quickly and told Mamma what the Father had said. I said I was worried because I could not imagine how I could leave her when she was so sick. She told me very gently that God, who had given me the opportunity to go for training, would look after her in my absence. She said I was not to take any chances, but was to leave straight away as the Father had directed. I applied the ointment to her back again, and went out to inform my uncles. They all had a good word for me but only one of them gave me one half-penny. They were not selfish, but they had no money. The man my father had instructed to give me money gave me fivepence only.

Late in the evening I packed the few belongings I had and put them in a small basin. I folded a mat, a new mat, and put it so that it covered the contents of the basin. I left my umbrella to Mamma, and very early in the morning set out for Bamenda. Mamma was up to bless me. She smiled as she walked with me a short distance from the house. Then she said ‘God bless you’, and the children all said the same. It was all I could do to hide my tears.

Endnote

1. Author's copyright. These are excerpts from the pseudonymous novella *Promise*, published by the African universities Press, Lagos, 1969, being No. 16 in their African Reader's Library; No. 17 was Dan Lantum's *Folk Tales of Nso'*. The pseudonym conceals the identity of Mrs Prudentia He'en Chilla who, after a successful career in education, joined the west Cameroon civil Service and subsequently became a Member of the House of Assembly. An account of girls' education at the Catholic Mission is given by Faay Lii Wong (Joseph Lafon) in his *History of the Catholic Church in Kumbo Diocese*, 1989, 186-9. We have only rectified the orthography of Nso', Kimbo' and Rookwa' and also fixed some punctuation marks.

Land And Cultivation Rights In Nso' In The Nineteen Forties

PHYLLIS M. KABERRY*

After the *Fon* had conquered Ngkar, Ndzerem, and the villages in the north-west and west, he became the overlord of all Nso' territory; those of his people who, until that time, had enjoyed considerable independence were left in possession of their land but held it subject to his overriding authority. In the past he had the right to dispossess any rebellious or criminal man, and to resume control of any area already allocated to a lineage head should he require it for purposes of his own or for some project of value to the country. In practice this was rarely if ever done; but, under modern conditions, the existence of the residuary rights of the *Fon* is evident whenever there arises the question of demarcating grazing ground for Fulani cattle or of leasing land to a Mission or the Government. He is under a moral obligation to consult the owners, to obtain their consent, and to secure some compensation for them if they stand to lose financially; but, in the last resort, his authority to carry through the transaction is not disputed by the bulk of his people. In general, however, it may be said that the *Fon's* claim to the overlordship of Nso' lands is a titular one, and represents the territorial "aspect of his political power. Residence in Nso' is conditional upon submission to the *Fon* and adherence to the laws of his country. For this reason strangers from other tribes who wish to settle must first obtain his permission before they formally approach some lineage head with a request for a house-site and farm plots.¹

* Reprinted by kind permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, which owns the Copyright, and extracted from Chapter III of Phyllis M Kaberry's *Women of the Grassfields*, HMSO, 1952, pp.31-48. Some very minor excisions have been made. The orthography of Lam Nso' terms, names and places has been brought into line with current usage. We have altered two words, substituting 'leave' for 'divorce', in the light of Kaberry's later fieldnotes, on p.26, 33.

The *Fon* also has certain areas reserved for his own needs: the site of the palace, and a water-supply nearby, which may only be approached by deputed servants and wives; a hill slope on the other side of the valley where thatching grass for his huts is cut; hunting grounds at Mbokam; and, finally, several plots of arable land near Kimbo' amounting to some 22 acres, which are cultivated in rotation by his wives. The best of the grain is removed to his storehouses for his personal use. His wives have separate farms of their own elsewhere, some on land belonging to the lineages of their parents, some demarcated for them by various *afaay* (lineage heads). In addition, there are also tracts near the villages of Bamnggam and Wa'si (near Jakiri) which, although vested specifically in the *Fon*, may be regarded as common land in so far as anyone who is unable to obtain sufficient land from kin or friends, is free to cultivate, without asking permission or paying a peppercorn rent of a basket of grain at harvest. Apart from these areas, the rest of Nso' territory is divided, subject to the ultimate authority of the *Fon*, among lineage heads some of whom, the sub-chiefs, the more important *vibay* and village heads, enjoy an exceptional position in terms of the large tracts which they control. But it should be stressed that the Village Head, by virtue of his office, has no titular claim to all the land within his village boundaries. He is the *Fon's* delegate and, as such, he is responsible for the maintenance of order, the transmission of the *Fon's* commands and the hearing of minor disputes, including those over land. But, where a case is not settled to the satisfaction of both parties, there is always the right of appeal to the Council of the *Fon* or, nowadays, the Native Court. However, in addition to being *Taante'* (Father of the Village), he is also a lineage head and it is by virtue of this position that he administers and allocates among his dependants certain tracts of land in the village and its vicinity, to which his ancestors laid claim in the past and which have been retained for the use of the lineage.³

Although the pattern of existing tenure is intricate the principles determining it are simple enough. In most cases a *faay's* land does not form one continuous tract. This is partly due to historical circumstances, partly to methods of cultivation. Sometimes a *faay* moved to another village where he acquired new land without in any way invalidating his rights to land he already held in the ancestral settlement. Again, when the number of dependants of a *faay* increased, he might find that he required more farm land, particularly if provision were to be made for fallowing. But it sometimes happened that blocks adjacent to his own had already been allocated by himself or his predecessor to other settlers, and he had therefore to search farther afield. Moreover, the Nso' grow a variety of crops which require different types of soil and different elevations; finger millet and *rizga*

do best on the dry hill tops, while maize and cocoyam thrive in the moist rich soil of the valleys. It is only rarely that a single original holding includes both types of land. I know of only one example in Kimbo', that of Faay woo Jem, whose compound is built on the outskirts of the village and who owns the adjacent land, which extends east up the valley as well as on to the surrounding hill tops. There is sufficient land for all his dependants and only one of these, for particular reasons, has borrowed a plot from a stranger. He is a Christian with a large family of four sons and four daughters. About four years ago he noticed that crops growing near Kinggomen (four miles to the east) were particularly fine and, as there was plenty of uncultivated land nearby, he asked the owner to lend him a plot for guinea corn and finger millet. He told me that he was bearing in mind the needs of his sons in the future. After marriage they would of course have rights to plots on the land of their own lineage; but the amount of good soil is limited and the Kinggomen land may well prove a welcome addition unless, in the meantime, the landholder decides to reclaim it for his own group. However, as I have already pointed out, the position of Faay woo Jem is exceptional. The wives of men who have recently settled in Kimbo' (including those of a newly-appointed *kibay*)⁴ must beg land from strangers, or else obtain plots from the heads of their lineages who may live several miles away in other villages.

Usually the transfer of a tract of land from one faay to another involved also the transfer of the privilege and duty of performing sacrifices to the god of the earth (*nyuy*) at a stone altar, either near the compound or in an outlying field; but, in some cases, the original holder continued to carry them out himself. Opinions varied on the subject of whether there was one god or many. Some people said there was only one god (*nyuy*) and his blessing might be invoked on specific localities by the performance of sacrifices at local altars. Others suggested there were many gods and pointed to the existence of a plural for the term for god; but they were in agreement that one of the gods, though unnamed like the rest, was supreme. This god created the first human beings and is associated with the earth (*nsay*) and its fertility. Reference is made to him in such phrases as 'God knows'; or 'God forbids'; or 'a thing of God'; or in the term for twins who are called 'children of God'.

Once a year, at the end of December when the *Fon* has given permission to his people to harvest their finger millet, he makes the journey along the route, which once linked Kovvifem with the royal raffia plantations at Mba', south of Kimbo'. Minor rituals are carried out at altars along the path, which has been cleared in preparation by the women beforehand. But it is at Kovvifem that the *Fon*, with the *Yeewong*, *Taanwong* and *Ndzeendzev*, performs the major sacrifice to his ancestors and *nyuy* to ensure the fertility of all Nso'

land and Nso' women. He is accompanied by many of his followers, and usually takes the opportunity to visit the more northern villages where there is feasting and rejoicing in his honour. The tie between *nyuy*, the earth, and the people who live on and cultivate the earth, is a close one and is expressed in moral and ritual terms. The rituals carried out at Kovvifem, and in other localities by lineage heads who have de *facto* control of tracts of land, are an expression of dependence on the supernatural, of gratitude for a plentiful harvest, and also of peace among the people. This last is important since, without it, the efficacy of the rituals may be endangered. Quarrels affect the growth of the crops; and therefore harmonious relations with the source of the earth's fertility, *nyuy*, may only be restored by a settlement of the dispute and atonement by sacrifice.⁶

No land may be pledged or sold in Nso', though the same does not apply to raffia and kola trees. But it should be noted that ownership, that is de *facto* control by afaay, is not contingent upon cultivation. There are some areas in Nso' which have never been farmed; and others which have only been brought under the hoe within the last twenty years or, in some cases, even more recently, although they have been vested in certain lineages for five or more generations. This principle must be clearly distinguished from that which determines the individual's right to *usufruct* of a *particular* plot allocated to him or her by a lineage head. Here, quite apart from the observance of rules and the fulfilment of kinship obligations, rights are dependent on continuous cultivation, allowing of course for periods of fallow. But, as long as a person requires the plot, it is left to him or to her to determine the period of grass fallow. Should he or she leave the village and not return to cultivate the plot, and should it be required by another person of the lineage, then the *faay* resumes and controls and re-allocates it. This brings us to the subject of individual rights of usufruct and, in particular, those of the women.

At first glance the system of land tenure may seem inflexible and one likely to operate in a manner adverse to the interests of the women in that, although they do all the farming, they have no legal control over the plots of land which they require for their various crops. Certain questions automatically arise: does the system involve preferential treatment for one sex, class, or age group in the community, or does it confer rights of usufruct upon all women by virtue of their kinship, affinal, local and political ties? Again, once farm plots have been allocated, what security of tenure do the women possess; what freedom do they enjoy in lending sections to others; and what voice have they in determining who shall take over a plot, once they have decided to abandon it permanently? The answers to many of these

questions hinge on a knowledge of the Nso' kinship system; but an analysis of land utilization and control throws in its turn, considerable light on the balance achieved between the power of the *Fon* on the one hand and the rights of lineage heads on the other; on the status of members of the lineage (including women) *vis-a-vis* the lineage head; on the factors making for cohesion within the lineage and on those which are productive of tension and fission. Here, we are attempting primarily to isolate the economic functions of kinship groups and their bearing on the position of women, but two points should be borne in mind: firstly, a change in the present system of land tenure by, for example, a re-allocation of arable areas among lineage heads, or by the introduction of individual ownership, would have consequences extending beyond the sphere of economics. It would, in short, entail a profound modification, dislocation, and perhaps even destruction of existing political, religious and kinship obligations. Secondly, an attempt to establish a sharp dichotomy between the rights of the women and those of the men is, in some respects, an artificial process and one contrary, in general, to Nso' attitudes, though a statement which I shall quote in a moment might appear to give the lie to this. But, on the whole, it is consonant with Nso' values to investigate rights to land in terms of an individual's status *qua* membership of particular kinship groups and not *qua* sex. Let us probe more deeply into the nature of ownership of land by *afaay*, the rights and responsibilities by which, in the last resort, it must be defined as a functioning system.

The Concept of Ownership

I am going to quote four statements which were made to me at different times. At first sight they appear to be contradictory, but they were accurate within the contexts in which they occurred; and, moreover, they may be reconciled if the concept of ownership is analysed at all levels. They are as follows:

(a) 'Men own the land; women own the crops.'

(b) 'A women only owns a farm; she does not own the earth (land); a lineage head owns the land. A lineage head, he alone owns the land; a 'son' (or a "daughter") of the compound does not own the land.'

(c) 'Farms, kola trees and raffia ought not to be given away, because these are things of the lineage.'

(d) 'A lineage head only has the power to give a new place (one not already allocated) to a stranger. A place, which people are cultivating, he ought not to give to a stranger.'

The first statement—'men own the land; women own the crops', or in a variant form such as 'women cannot inherit land; only men own the land'—was made to me on a number of occasions, not only in Nso', but also in other parts of Bamenda. One particular instance will serve to underline the distinction which the men had in mind. In 1945, a land dispute came up for review in the Native Court and the putative plaintiff was a woman who was acting on behalf of her sick father, a *faay*. She won the case, but soon afterwards it was bruited round the village that the Reviewing Officer had not understood that she was only acting as her father's representative, and he had assumed that she was the *de facto* owner of the plot in question. Various friends of mine were disturbed lest it should serve as a precedent; and they pointed out that, if her son were astute, he might be tempted to claim the land on the score that it has been recognized in Court as his mother's. But, it was asserted emphatically, women do not own land; they only control the crops. It is true, as we shall see later, that a woman sometimes lends a friend a small section, but this is a personal arrangement between the two women and has no validity in a court. For example, if a woman called A has a large plot she may give her friend B permission to cultivate a section of it. If, at a later date, another woman called C begins to encroach on B's plot, B cannot take the matter to the council since she only received rights of usufruct from A, who has no legal authority. The procedure followed in such a case would be for A to make the trespass known to her husband (or to her own father if the plot is on the land of his lineage) who would then tell C to go away. Should this fail, A's husband would report the matter to the *faay* who allocated the land in the first instance. If the case were taken to court, the *faay* might be plaintiff against C, or else A's husband would appear as plaintiff and call on the *faay* as his witness.

But, in the statement quoted above, the main distinction drawn is between spheres of influence. All women manage their crops; and all women, by virtue of their sex, are ineligible for the office of *faay* or *sheey* in which control is vested.⁷ But although all men are eligible for such an office, only a few attain it. And this brings us to the second statement; 'a woman only owns the farm; she does not own the land. A *faay* owns the land; a 'son' or 'daughter' of the compound does not own the land.' Here it is necessary to define more precisely the meaning of the terms, *sum*, *nggven*, and *nsay*. *Sum* is a farm plot; *nsay* is the earth or soil; and *nggven* is land, but more especially

arable land and is used, for example, in the phrase *cu nggven--to* sacrifice for the land and ensure its fertility. The verb, *ker*, has a number of cognate meanings--to hold, have, own, or manage; and the connotation depends on the context. In the statement quoted *above--niy ker sum* (woman has the farm)—there is no implication of absolute control, but rather of management of a farm plot while it is in her hands. Neither she nor a male dependant of the lineage has, ultimately, any legal claim to its disposal. It is the *faay* (or *sbeey*) who administers the property of the lineage; that is, he makes the original allocation of plots among members of his lineage and among his sisters' children, and also among more distant relatives, affines, friends or strangers who approach him with a request for land. Whatever temporary arrangements the beneficiaries may make about the use of their plots the *faay* has, in the event of a dispute, the overriding voice; and, moreover, he retains the privilege of reclaiming allotments. I should say the legal privilege since, as we shall see, he is under a moral obligation to exercise this only in certain circumstances.

And this brings us to a consideration of the obverse aspect of his authority—his responsibilities. Although it is left to a *faay* to decide whether distant kin, affines, friends or strangers should be granted plots, he should do so only when it does not prejudice the interests of his dependants, or deprive them of land which is necessary for their subsistence. Secondly, he should look to the future and safeguard his patrimony for the next generation. For example, kola trees and raffia plantations may be sold or pledged, but male dependants should be consulted; and it is done only in cases of necessity and never on a large scale.⁸ Kola and raffia are 'things of the lineage'; they are its capital or, as one may put it, 'the source of salt and oil', the means by which money is obtained to buy necessities. Though a *faay* reaps the major profit from the sales of the produce (nuts, wine, poles), he is expected to assist his dependants in times of emergency. But land, while it is in a different category in so wished to cultivate it in the following season. His real motive was that he did not wish the woman to secure a foothold.

I have described this incident in some detail because it brings out clearly that, behind the respect and obedience which dependants (not excluding the wives) express towards the *faay*, there is also a strong sense of their own rights and of his corresponding obligations. It is the responsibility of a *faay* to perform all the sacrifices deemed necessary for the security and welfare of his group; to look after their interests and not merely to further his own ambitions; to act as trustee rather than as selfish consumer; and to keep his patrimony intact as far as possible for his successor and his dependants. It should be stressed here that *Faay woo Bum* is atypical in his conduct and is

considered so by a number of people in Kimbo'. As my friends phrased it, with a gift for understatement which is almost English: 'his ways are different!' In the incident described above, some of the senior men of the compound protested to him about his action but he was adamant. It was said that in the old days his dependants might have asked the *Fon* to remove him from office on the score of his neglect of a wide range of duties. But now, they explained, things are different and the best they could hope for was that the next *faay* would be a better man. *Faay* woo Bum is in his late fifties and may reasonably be expected to join the ancestors soon! In the meantime he runs the risk of incurring the anger of ancestors and bringing misfortune on himself and his children. He may also forfeit the allegiance of some of his male dependants who, when they find the conditions become increasingly intolerable, may set up compounds elsewhere. When a *faay* is lacking in moral sensibility, these two sanctions usually operate as restraints on his behaviour. But in the case of *Faay* woo Bum they seemed ineffective and already some of his male relatives living in a neighbouring compound had taken the first steps towards a permanent break.

One further point should be considered, namely rights to a house-site in a compound. A man is allotted an area by the *faay* and when he wishes to build another dwelling he normally has no difficulty in obtaining permission to utilize vacant land nearby.¹² When he dies, his widow continues to occupy her hut, and his adolescent sons may take over their father's hut. But if he has no male issue the hut reverts to the *faay*, who either allocates it to another member of the compound or allows a stranger to live there. But in this last case, once the hut has fallen into decay, another may not be built without the express consent of the *faay*; whereas in regard to a member of the lineage this would not be required.

Women's Rights to Usufruct

So far we have looked at ownership in terms of the *faay*'s rights and the circumstances in which they are exercised. We shall now consider the rights of the women and the extent to which they compare favourably with those of the 'sons' of the lineage head.

Most Nso' girls grow up in the compound under the authority of the head of their father's lineage. At an early age they begin to importune their mothers for a pocket-handkerchief plot where they may cultivate a few plants of *riẓga*, millet, sweet potatoes, or maize. Sometimes a group of such midget farmers takes over the ground no longer considered worth farming by their mothers; and there, in company, they experiment, learn and compete with

one another. More often, however, a woman marks out a small plot on her own farm for her daughter. By the time a girl is 14 or 15 years old she assists her mother regularly on the main farms, and has two or three for which she is directly responsible and which she regards as her own. They increase in size or number, and it often happens that she is put in charge of outlying farms if her mother is old or sickly. Two individuals may together cultivate about 1.9 acres, or more if there are young children to be fed in the household. A married woman with no children, or only one or two, works a total of some 1.3 acres.

When a girl marries, at the age of seventeen or later, she is under no compulsion to surrender her plots and, if she is living in the same village, she generally continues to work them, to assist her mother, and to receive help in return. Even when her husband belongs to another village where there is plenty of land, she is reluctant to abandon her own plots which she had farmed for several years and for which she has a certain sentimental attachment. But particularly important is the companionship of her mother, sisters, and friends who offer a refuge and a respite from the strangeness of her husband's village. If she lives only some three or four miles away, she may return several times a week to tend her old farms, sometimes remaining the night with her mother. What I wish to emphasize here is that her sex in nowise places her at a disadvantage *vis-a-vis* male members of the lineage. As long as she cultivates her plot she is under no obligation to cede it to a kinsman. Let me quote one instance among many. Yirbongka is a woman past child-bearing who enjoys good health and has five surviving children, some of whom live in Kimbo'. Her marriage was, from the Nso' point of view, illegal in that it took place without the permission of her *faay*. After a number of years she returned to her father's compound, which was close by. During her marriage, however, she had continued to farm some of the plots allocated to her in her adolescence, one of them being a large strip of fertile colluvial land near the compound. In her possession of this she enjoys an advantage over some of her brother's wives. Yet, there is no question of her surrendering it, nor did I ever hear the others express jealousy. She is dignified, good-tempered, kindly, and respected and liked by the rest of the compound, including the *faay*, who often makes her the recipient of his confidences. When she dies, or perhaps before that, she may give some of her plots to her son's wife, some to her daughters; and perhaps others again to other members of the compound. Those not allocated by her personally would return to the common pool until re-allocated by the *faay* himself.

If, however, a married woman lives far away from her parental compound and is not prepared to make the journey, her plots will either be

taken over by her mother or sisters; or, if they are not required by them, they revert to grassland and are at the disposal of the *faay*. Should she at a later date become a widow or leave her husband and desire to return to her parental home, she resumes cultivation of her old plots if they have not been re-allocated and providing the *faay* agrees; or she may be granted others in their stead.

As a general rule, a married woman finds it convenient to have her farms on the land of her husband's lineage. When a man marries, his *faay* demarcates an area for him, and, in addition, his own mother may make one or two of her own plots available for the bride. As the size of the family increases, a woman requires a larger area and, if it is available in her husband's village, she prefers to work it rather than to make a long journey to her mother's village. Care of her children and heavier responsibilities lead her to conserve her time and energy as much as possible. Granted a choice of plots, the decision rests with her. As one woman explained to me: 'I have given up my farm at Ngkar (some 10 miles away). My husband was unwilling because the ground was good; but I had delivered three children and was tired.'

Besides rights of usufruct in land of the father's lineage, a man and a woman enjoy almost similar rights in regard to plots on land of their mother's lineage. That this is a matter of the privileges of kinship and not a favour secured through friendship is brought out by the fact that no gift of maize is demanded at harvest. My first interpreter, Benedict Tata, told me that his wife was working a large plot at Tabessob, which had previously belonged to his mother and was part of the land of her lineage. When I asked if he had first to obtain his mother's brother's permission, he said 'No' If it is my mother's farm (*sum*), I do not have to beg permission from any man at all. I am cultivating it.' But, while I encountered other examples of this, they were for obvious reasons few in number. Usually a woman obtains sufficient land for her needs from the *faay* of her husband or her father; and it is only when she has a large family and also is living near her mother's father that she is likely to capitalize, as it were, her ties with him.

When her husband's land is poor or inadequate and she lives far from her own kin, she may 'beg' plots from some *faay* in the village or from her women friends. This is more likely to occur in Kimbo' than in other villages because of a large population and increasing pressure on local land reserves; and, finally, the tendency for a number of men to take up residence there rather than in their father's village. This is particularly true in the case of ex-servants of the *Fon* and sons of the *Fon*. Sometimes it is left to the woman herself to approach a *faay* with a supplicatory gift of food and 'beg' that he

demarcate a plot for her; sometimes her husband may take a calabash of palm wine and make the request. If the *faay* has vacant land either he or his delegate marks the boundaries, and the woman is then free to plant her crops providing she observes the rules for a traditional rest-day, when the hoe must not be wielded. At harvest she presents the *faay* with a basket of grain (never tubers); but if the yield has been poor, he is content with a few cobs and may even waive these. The gift is a formal acknowledgement that right to usufruct is dependent on the goodwill of the landholder. Often the husband supplements it by small offerings of salt, tobacco, and wine in order to keep the relationship 'sweet', and perhaps obtain a little more land when the first plot reverts to fallow. When a person has cultivated a plot for many years, more especially in the case of an affine, no demand for the peppercorn rent may be made, but it is understood that the original conditions of transfer still remain in force. Sometimes a village head (*taante*) has an exceptionally large tract of land, of which outlying portions have never been cultivated and he will permit another *faay*, who is a close friend in a neighbouring village, to take over a large block for allocation among his own dependents. The original holder does not surrender his claims to it, but, where it is unlikely he will require it for his own kin, such land tends to be regarded as belonging to the beneficiary *faay*. For example, there is one block on the boundaries between Kimbo' and Kinggomen which was granted to Faay woo Jung in Kimbo' by a *faay* in Kinggomen some 20 years ago. The dependants of Faay woo Jung still cultivate it and, while admitting it is a loan, feel secure in their tenure and do not envisage the possibility of eviction. One man has obtained permission to plant raffia there; and the women decide among themselves who shall farm. For instance, an inherited wife of Faay woo Jung, an old woman, has decided that her son's wife is to take over her plot; a widowed sister of Faay woo Jung has 'given' hers to a friend in the adjoining compound, which belongs to a sub-lineage of the same clan as that of Faay woo Jung.

Security of Tenure

Both a man and a woman have, then, a number of alternative means for obtaining land. Moreover, as is apparent from earlier remarks, an individual expects to retain the usufruct of plots received from the heads of the lineages of both parents. Normally a woman, once she has been granted plots, continues to farm them for the rest of her life, often transmitting them to her sons or daughters. It is left to her to decide the period of grass fallow, which may be from three to six years, and may extend to 10 or more without

invalidating her position as temporary occupier. She regards the plots as her own, jealously safeguards her boundaries, is quick to report any encroachment; and, finally, she rests secure in the knowledge that, without due cause, she will not be dispossessed during her lifetime. When these facts are taken into account, the two statements—‘women own the farms’ and ‘women do not own the land’—are not contradictory but refer to different types of ownership or, rather, different sets of rights. Even when a new faay succeeds to the position of compound head he is morally bound to leave his dependants in possession of plots allocated to them by his predecessor. This principle is usually observed for, ‘a faay only has the power to give a new place (one not already allotted) to a stranger, a place which people are working he ought not to give a stranger’. The circumstances in which a person might be called upon to forfeit his claims will be discussed later. But it should be pointed out that a faay should only evict a dependant who has committed a serious breach of duty. Action for any other reason is likely to be regarded as arbitrary and would provoke the just question: ‘Where have I erred? I have not spoilt anything. Why are you angry?’ Nevertheless if a faay persists in reclaiming a plot against the wishes of his dependants there is nothing to be done about it, as the following incident will illustrate. Unfortunately, Faay woo Bum again figures as the villain of the piece, or as one who frequently acts in a way contrary to Nso’ values.¹³

One day I arrived at John’s compound to find him perturbed and rather angry about a plot which was a short distance from his house and which had lain fallow for five years. He told me that his wife, Mary, and also two inherited wives of Faay woo Bum, had been given these by the late faay long ago. John had intended clearing it but had just discovered another man (to whom he at first referred as a ‘stranger’) had forestalled him. John said he was going to ask the man who had given him permission and report the matter to Faay woo Bum. It was then that he made the statement which I have quoted several times previously to the effect that a faay has no power to re-allocate a plot which a person is farming. He also admitted that the stranger was in reality a ‘brother’ who had gone to live in Kitiwum. He was particularly incensed because he had rendered him many services such as looking after his kola trees and mangoes.

When I next met John and asked him about the dispute he said ruefully that he had given way, since his ‘brother’ was the elder and he did not wish to quarrel.¹⁴ Moreover, the two inherited wives of the faay had apparently made no strong objection to surrendering their plots, which were adjacent. without their support his position was weak, but he still considered that his rights had been infringed and he cherished a grievance.

It remains to discuss the circumstances in which a *faay* has legal and some moral justification for withdrawing rights of usufruct from a beneficiary who is a kinsman. Two examples will bring out the principle involved. Not far from Bum there was a small compound which had been founded by a father's brother of Faay woo Bum. The compound head had only the status of *nggaala*' (as he was still a dependant of Bum), but on account of his age and the fact that he had one married son, Maximilian, and another, Dwemfe, he was sometimes addressed as *sheey* as a matter of courtesy. About a year before my arrival he contracted a serious illness, but although Faay woo Bum passed the compound almost daily on his way to drink wine at one of his clubs, he rarely called in to enquire after his 'son', to sit with him, and to hear his dying wishes. However, once the *nggaal*' was dead, the *faay* made a prompt appearance in the compound and seized the livestock, clothes and money to which he was legally entitled; but he discovered that Dwemfe had hidden his father's dane-gun because he was angry about the neglect shown by the *faay* previously. The *faay* persisted in his attempts to secure possession of the gun, but was reluctant to take the matter to court because of the publicity which would be thrown on his own unfatherly conduct towards the dying man. But in 1949 he ordered Dwemfe to relinquish two farm plots which were large and at a convenient distance from his compound.

The reactions of the other dependants of Faay woo Bum are of particular interest here. John and some of the wives of the *faay* admitted that Dwemfe had legitimate cause for grievance in the callousness and lack of care which the *faay* had displayed when the *nggaala*' was dying. But, while they recognized the hardship which the *faay*'s decision entailed for Dwemfe's wife, they did not question the *faay*'s right to reclaim the land; and, in fact, they regarded his action as inevitable once it was clear that the breach would not be healed. In the dry season of 1947, Dwemfe's wife had only a little over 0.33 acre for cultivation and, by the end of the year, Dwemfe was buying grain for the household. Fortunately, his income was somewhat about the average and, moreover, he had taken steps to improve his position for the coming year. Through his mother he was a distant relative of the *Fon*, and in formal conversation he repudiated his ties with the *mtaar* lineage of his father and stressed that he was a *wir duy*. He was on very friendly terms with a relative of his mother who lived in a compound not far away; he attended the weekly *njangi* there, and cultivated the friendship of its *faay* who, in February 1948, lent him a fairly large plot of land.

In another incident, which concerned the same compound, Faay woo Bum appeared in a better light. Dwemfe's brother, Maximilian, was a Christian who was a somewhat cantankerous and idle fellow, although he had

a wife and three children to support. At different times he had been entrusted with the care of stands of raffia by their owners and had profited from the perquisites which went with the task, namely some of the wine and also the poles, which are cut away when the palm is tapped. In each case he skimmed his duties and lost the job. Eventually, his own *faay*, Bum, put him in charge of one stand of raffia, but again Maximilian performed the task in a negligent fashion and at last said he wanted to give it up. Faay woo Bum was very angry and threatened to deprive Maximilian's wife of her farm plots,--a course of action in which he had the support of some of the men of the compound. The *faay* was reported to have said: 'If you give up one thing, you give up all!'; and my informant went on to explain that a man cannot accept one thing (such as farm land) from his 'Father' (the *faay*) and, at the same time, refuse others (in this case, the care of a small clump of raffia and the perquisites which went with it). A man should be grateful for anything the *faay* may give him. In the end, the *faay* relented over the land out of pity for Maximilian's wife Rebecca. 'She weeps before the *faay*: "Where is her ground? She has two children. Where is her work?" Then the *faay* says: "Go and work"' (But) he is estranged from Maximilian. Maximilian's conduct is not good. The *faay* will tap the raffia. Maximilian is always having quarrels.'

It remains to consider the rights of a woman to lend a plot or a section of a plot to others for a short period. This type of arrangement, as pointed out earlier, is to be distinguished from the right of a *faay*, since it is a matter of mutual convenience and is not legally binding on either party. Nor does the new farmer hand over a basket of grain at harvest. The practice indicates, however, the confidence which the men repose in the judgment of the women, and their recognition that the women, as farmers, should in most cases be left to decide the use to which the land is put. Even when a woman has received plots from her husband, she does not necessarily consult him first and he generally supports her in the event of a dispute. For instance, Mary, the wife of John, gave a woman friend in a neighbouring compound permission to cultivate a small area. In the following year she withdrew the right, not because of any quarrel, but because she deemed it expedient to resume control. The woman's husband begged John to reverse Mary's decision, but John's reply was 'Mary has refused. The matter is closed.'

The motives which influence a woman to make a plot available to another may be those of friendship, a desire to help one in need, or to make a return for past services. Sometimes it happens that, in an area which has lain fallow for several years, all the women begin cultivation in the same season except for one individual. Yet her patch with its tall grasses will then become a sanctuary for pests and small animals which will ravage the crops

on the surrounding farms; and, out of consideration for the farmers, she may allow one to take over the plot for the year.

There are two other practices which throw light on the woman's rights. In the first place *riṣga* is often planted on the high hill-tops where other crops do not thrive. The plots are extremely small (two or three hundred square yards or even less) and the *faay* does not bother to demarcate the boundaries. Instead on an appointed day, the women of the compound, under the leadership of the senior wife of the *faay*, ascend the hill. Each pegs out a claim sufficient for her needs and, if there is any bickering, the senior wife steps in to quell it. Sometimes finger millet is planted the following year, but after that the land usually reverts to grass fallow for 8 or 10 years.

In regard to the farm plots allocated by her husband or her father, we have already seen that she often chooses who is to cultivate them once she has decided to surrender them permanently. She would, in such a case, designate certain kin only: a son or daughter, a husband's brother's son or daughter if the land belongs to her husband's lineage; or a son, daughter, brother or sister, if the land belongs to her own father's lineage. Again and again I encountered instances of this, and the pattern of tenure which emerges is that a certain number of farm plots tend to remain in the hands of a segment of the lineage--a man, his sons, and daughters, and his sons' sons. Of course, if a woman leaves her husband she forfeits any rights to plots received from him and also the standing crops, providing the marriage has been contracted legally,--that is, with the consent of her own *xaay*. On the other hand, if she has lived with her husband without the consent of her own *xaay* and has only the status of a *wiiy wo cemen*, she may harvest her crops, but runs the risk of a stormy encounter with an irate husband.¹⁵ The possibility of such a brawl was brought out rather cynically on one occasion when a woman who was a *wiiy wo cemen* told her friend that she was thinking of leaving her husband. Her confidante advised her to wait until she had harvested her crops!

Sylvan Resources

Before bringing our survey of land tenure in Nso' to a close, some account must be given of control of kola trees and raffia. Like land, these are regarded as the property of the lineage, and their management is vested in the *xaay* or *sheey*.¹⁶ If a man plants kola or raffia trees he enjoys the fruits of his labour, but at his death they are taken over by the *faay*, and not by his own sons or brothers. This applies also when they have been planted on the land of another *xaay* from whom, in the first place, permission must have been

obtained. The landholder, in this case, would have no right to a gift of produce nor any right to the trees. There is, however, one minor exception to the rule of inheritance. A man or a woman may plant one or two kola trees and a small raffia stand in the name of a son, who is then assured of rights of usufruct to the produce. But when the son himself dies the trees are, inherited by the *faay*. Women do not own kolas or raffia, but an exception is made for a *Yaa* or *Yeevong* who is often given a little raffia and a few kola trees by the *Fon* for her own use during her lifetime. At her death they are taken over by the *Fon*, who may entrust the care of them to her son.

A *xaay* often superintends his own trees and plantations--weeding, gathering the nuts, tapping the wine, and cutting away the midribs. But he normally entrusts the care of some of his property to one of the members of the lineage; or, if it is in another village, then to a kinsman or friend living there. The man in charge (*nggaaru'*) is allowed to keep some of the wine, providing he supplies the *xaay* with some on request. If he is entrusted with a few kola trees, he weeds them and gathers the nuts, receiving in return some of the small ones--a hundred or so. Much depends on the generosity of the *faay*. It is exceptional for a *faay* to manage all his sylvan resources; when this does occur, he is regarded as mean and selfish. In the gathering of the nuts, those present in the compound help the *faay* and, it must be admitted, help themselves to a few which they either conceal in their loin cloths if they are men, or which they rush to hide in a corner if they are women' The *faay* reaps the major monetary profit; but, on the whole, this is equitable since he usually has several wives and many children for whom to provide, as well as his other dependants in times of emergency. Nowadays, owing to the rise in cost of living, some *afaay* are tempted to skimp their responsibilities; but it should be recognized that the pursuit of new and relatively lucrative occupations has given some of the younger men a considerable measure of economic independence and security. This is particularly marked in areas outside Nso' where regular marriage payments are made and where there is now less tendency for male dependants to look to their lineage head for assistance in this matter. In Nso', the general trader, carpenter, fruit-grower or coffee-planter often enjoys a larger income than many a *faay*. He is able to meet the needs of his own wife and children, besides helping poor relatives and even a financially embarrassed *faay*. But complications may arise over inheritance. The question is whether costly tools of trade or livestock such as pigs and cattle, or plantations of fruit trees and coffee are to be placed in the same category as the other sources of wealth traditionally inherited by a *faay*; or whether they are to be regarded as personal property over which the owner has full rights of disposal. At least one coffee-planter expressed the

fear that his sons would not be allowed to inherit his plantations, and he was anxious to know if he might make a will bequeathing them specifically to his children.

The problem is a difficult one and not confined to Nso'. Both mixed farming and the cultivation of cash crops may well prove an important factor in raising the standard of living; but each entails some financial outlay, as well as expenditure of initiative, time, and labour. It seems only fair to those who are prepared to take the risk and branch out in new fields of economic enterprise that they should have some measure of security in regard to land tenure and the disposal of their property after death. Despite the strength of lineage ties and the fact that the lineage still functions as a corporate unit in many spheres of social life it is true to say, I think, that concern for the future of his sons and a desire to make provision for their welfare has become one of the dominant motives of the average Nso' man.

But once the principle is recognized that the *faay* or *sheey*, by virtue of his office, has no claims to the inheritance of semi-permanent crops, then increased cultivation of coffee, or groves of orange, grapefruit, avocado pear, or mango-trees may well create problems in the sphere of land tenure itself, since the land involved would, to all intent and purposes, become vested in the farmer and his heirs. Once a *faay* becomes aware of this possibility he may well refuse in the first place to grant permission for their cultivation, since he already exercises this right in regard to another permanent crop, namely raffia. No difficulty need arise so long as relations between the *faay* and the cultivator or his heirs remain amicable; but, if a quarrel occurs and the *faay* decides to resume control of the land, what is to happen to the crops? A sale of the crops might take place; but, if the *faay* himself does not want to buy them, then any prospective purchaser would want security of tenure. Renting and sale of land were forbidden by Nso' law but, granted the development of a system of leasehold, the way is open for an abuse of his privileges on the part of the *faay*, unless explicit provision is made for the consultation and consent of the members of his lineage in any questions affecting a transfer of land. Moreover, a *faay* himself might begin to cultivate permanent cash crops on lineage land, which was not allocated or which had been abandoned by its farmer users, with the result that the area for subsistence farming by his dependants would increasingly diminish. On the other hand, there is the possibility that members of a lineage might form a co-operative for the cultivation and ownership of cash crops, or for the rearing of cattle. These problems are not confined to Nso' but are likely to arise also on much of the uplands and plains, since in none of these regions is there a system which approximates to individual tenure.

Summary of the Nso' System

I have discussed at some length the functioning of the Nso' system of land tenure in order to show its flexibility and the degree of economic security which it affords to farmers under subsistence conditions; and I have also analysed the new problems that are arising from the development of permanent cash crops. In the mass of detail, however, the main features have perhaps become blurred and require some re-emphasis before we turn to other types of land ownership in Bamenda. In the first place, control of residential and arable land is vested in a number of patrilineage heads (*afaay* and *asbeey*): that is, in the last resort, the Nso' court recognizes that the authority to allocate or withdraw rights of usufruct to farm plots and residential sites resides in such men, as long as they remain in office. But, as the previous discussion has shown, a purely legalistic approach to ownership is inadequate for an understanding of the functioning of the system and the underlying attitudes. The concept of ownership has moral as well as legal connotations; it involves trusteeship and responsibility. From this point of view it is just as misleading to speak of a *faay* as 'owning' the land as it would be to regard him as 'owning' his dependants. He is primarily a father to them (*taala*'), promoting their welfare, exercising his authority for the benefit of the group as a whole, and granting to its members the means necessary for their subsistence. Just as it is almost inconceivable to a Nso' man that a father should deny food to a child while it remains under his care, so likewise it is opposed to Nso' values that a *faay* should deny land for subsistence to anyone of his dependants while such an individual remains under his protection and authority. According to ancient Nso' custom, a good *faay* keeps everything in order. 'He concerns himself with the building of houses for his "children", and when they go to cut grass he accompanies them and encourages them. Then, as one *faay* pointed out to me, "my "children" will call me a good lineage head, because I know how to help them. I cannot sit down (doing nothing) because I am a lineage head.'

The system of land tenure is, apart from other considerations, of the utmost importance for an understanding of the persistence of the lineage as a corporate unit even under present day conditions, when the spread of Christianity and decisions in the Court in regard to marriage and the custody of children have done much to undermine the influence of the lineage head. Prestige is closely bound up with the number of families which live in a *faay*'s compound as well as others which, through lack of building space, have been compelled to take up residence elsewhere but retain economic and other social ties with him. A compound in which the membership has gradually

dwindled away and where houses are in a state of bad repair is referred to in terms of disparagement which reflect on the *faay* himself. A *faay*, then, does not wilfully drive away his male dependants even when they have become converts to Christianity. As long as they give allegiance in other than spiritual matters he is prepared generally, and is indeed willing, to grant them house-sites and farm land. They, on their side, are content to respect and obey him in affairs which do not involve any conflict with their religious principles. The advantages, from their point of view, are twofold: in the first place, there is the companionship of brothers and other close kin with whom ties of affection and common interest have been forged during early life; and, secondly, there are rights of usufruct to farm land. It is true, as we have seen, that in Nso' no man need be landless: -there are a number of alternatives for obtaining farm plots. But normally most of these are utilized in only a subsidiary degree, since a man's claims are strongest and most clearly defined in regard to the land of his own lineage. Apart from those areas which may be allotted to him specifically by his *faay*, he usually takes over, or expects to take over later, some of the more fertile and accessible plots cultivated by his own mother.

And this brings us to another feature of the Nso' system. While in theory plots may be re-allocated at the will of the *faay*, in practice they tend to remain in the hands of the individual and the descendants of the individual to whom they were first granted. In short, the allocation of land to a member of the lineage (male or female) carries the implicit assurance of security of tenure. If a change is to be made the *faay* endeavours to obtain the consent of the erstwhile farmer. Furthermore, once a person no longer requires certain plots, he or she is often permitted to decide who shall take them over. The choice is confined to members of the compound or of the lineage living elsewhere; but, within these limits, there is scope for the play of preference for some individuals as against others.

Finally, as we have seen, a woman as a member of her lineage enjoys all the advantages of a man in respect to rights of usufruct throughout her span of life. Even after marriage her rights are nowise infringed and these, with her skill as farmer, give her considerable economic independence. Should she leave her husband or decide to leave his compound when she becomes a widow, she is able to obtain plots on the land of the lineages of either of her parents and grow the crops with which to support herself. As a wife or a daughter, she assumes full responsibility for the management of her farms and, in practice, she is free to lend sections to her kin and friends. When she decides to abandon them it is customary for her husband to give weight to

her opinion on the issue of who is to take them over; if she is the wife of a *faay* the matter may be left in her hands.

As far as differential rights on the basis of rank and age are concerned, it should be stressed that these do not penalize, under present conditions, the newly-married woman or the woman of low status. 'Granted residence in the village of the lineage of the husband and amicable relationships between him and his *faay*, the main factors determining the total acreage farmed by a woman are her age, the size of her family, her good health, and energy. A *Yeela*', a senior wife, or a wife who is a daughter or grand-daughter of the *Fon*,--all these derive some advantage from their rank, not in the amount of land which they cultivate but often in the possession of large fertile plots within easy access of the compound. As far as the *faay* himself is concerned, he usually has two or three farms (*shuu sum*), divided into strips, for each of which a woman or adolescent girl of the compound is responsible. The *faay* takes the best of the maize (sometimes the best of the guinea corn and finger millet when these are planted); but a woman has full rights to any tubers, gourds, greens, and legumes which she has sown on her strip.

Endnotes

1. An exception is made in the case of people from Oku. Oku people are referred to as 'brothers' and are free to settle without asking permission of the Fon-Nso'.

2. Shuufaay Ndzeendzev has large tracts of arable land in Kimbo', Mba', and Shuv which amount to some 7.7 acres. He has others at Mbam where his ancestor first settled when he came from Nsungli to join the reigning *Fon* at Kovvifem. The original compound has long since disappeared; but the farm land is in the charge of the Shuufaay's delegate who grants permission to those wishing to cultivate. A gift of grain is made to him at harvest and stored until required by Ndzeendzev in the event of a shortage in Kimbo'.

3. Character and not seniority in age is the main criterion for eligibility to any position of authority in Nso', though usually a married man has a better claim than one who is single. In the choice of a *Taante*', an office vested in the lineage of the first settlers, the opinion of members of the lineage is given particular weight; but, in addition, that of senior lineage heads in the village

would also be taken into account, and in any case the *Fon* must ratify their decision.

4. The *Yeela* of a *kibay* who had decided to reside in Kimbo', had to go far afield. She had some plots six miles away in Tabessob (Sov), her father's village; and other plots, "begged" from strangers, at Kinggomen and Meluv.

5. Unfortunately, I did not see this ritual as it would have involved my being absent from Kimbo' during the period when the women were harvesting millet. But, on several occasions, I was present when lineage heads offered sacrifices to *nyuy* after the harvest of millet, or just prior to it in the case of one *kibay*. Incidentally, one way of discovering the original owner of an area is to ~enquire who formerly sacrificed for the land (*au nggven*). But the answer may require checking since a *faay* is sometimes reluctant to admit that his ancestor "begged" the land from someone else. This is partly a matter of prestige; but also partly due, under present unsettled conditions, to the fear that he may be deprived of it.

6. In some cases, an outburst of bitter quarrelling in a compound may be attributed by the diviner to the fact that *nyuy* requires a sacrifice. One *kibay* whom I knew, was having trouble with bickering among his wives, and called upon the former landholder to perform the rite. Peace was restored!

7. In the case of a lineage having no *adult* or adolescent males to succeed to the position of *faay* or *sheey*, a woman is sometimes appointed by the head of the clan or sub-clan to act as trustee, until one of the boys comes of age and can assume responsibility. For example, in a sub-lineage of Yuuwar in Mbam, a woman has been chosen for this role by Faay woo Yuuwar, the sub-clan head resident in Kimbo'. She is a titular *sheey*, performs sacrifices, and administers the family property, including land, kolas, and raffia.

8. I was told by one man that nowadays, when a *faay* or *sheey* decides to abandon a compound, he may try to sell the kola trees. Such an action provokes disapproval and is regarded as selfish (*kinggan*), since he should leave the trees for his brothers and sons if he does not want to look after them.

9. The *nggiri* society has its quarters (*la'*) near the palace, and its membership is drawn solely from among male members of the dynastic clan. The society meets for recreation, and for the performance of certain rituals and masked dances.

10. Some of the information which I received was given to me in confidence and, where this is so, I shall use pseudonyms for any individuals concerned.

11. sometimes one *faay* criticizes another for lack of responsibility. On one occasion a *faay*, who was a friend of mine, spoke with keen disapproval of the conduct of the head of a sub-clan: "Faay woo X is proud (literally, feels his body is different). He does not look after the people here at all. He only likes to eat the things here. If there is no sub-lineage head here to gather the kola nuts then the people (of the compound) go and give (the nuts) to him. He then sells them and eats."

12. When a man builds his first hut in the compound, the landholder, who is usually the resident *faay* kindles the first fire, pours a little palmwine in libation, and invokes the blessing of God and the ancestors on the new householder.

13. Faay woo Bum was in some respects a likeable person, rather astute, and always courteous to me. I regret that I must so often cite actions (or sometimes lack of action) which place him in an unfavourable light; but, as every anthropologist knows, a breach of custom is often one of the means by which a deeper insight into values and attitudes is obtained.

14. It is significant that John, in his first outburst of anger, deliberately referred to his father's brother's son as a 'stranger'; that is, he temporarily repudiated the relationship. Later, in a calmer mood, he emphasized the kinship tie as a reason for ceding his claim.

15. The deserted husband does not relinquish his claims to the plots: he may allocate them among other wives, or allow them to revert to grassland until he acquires a new wife; or, more rarely, he may permit a younger brother's wife to make use of them.

16. In the case of a compound which for some years lacked a resident *sheey*, the produce of the kola trees was taken by the sub-clan head who lived in another village. But, once a new *sheey* was appointed in 1947, he had no further rights.

17. This is a free translation of the Lam Nso' text given me by a *faay*. The *faay* concerned also said a woman describes a *faay* as a good man when "he

buys salt, buys oil, buys a hoe, buys a stirring rod for porridge.” If her mother comes to visit, he cooks a good relish (fowl) and gives it to her. When she goes she finds something (that is, a gift) has been put in her bag. Then she goes away rejoicing for a good lineage head.

Nuptiality In The Jakiri District Of Cameroon

DAN N. LANTUM*

Introduction

One of the five principal variables of demographic change is nuptiality. It is difficult to study this variable because, by its nature, it is influenced by several socio-cultural sub-variables many of which are diffuse and interrelated, and cannot lend themselves easily to definition and standardization for clear communication. Worse still, marriage practices differ not only among broad racial and cultural groups but even among ethnic groups within the same race, and even within tribes and clans within the same ethnic groups. Further, these differences do not remain static, for the practices themselves change with time in response to the normal evolutionary change in society. Jacob and stern (1955) made this same observation and provided an explanation in the following terms:

Special historical developments in the culture of different areas, their economic levels and many other diverse conditions have resulted in strikingly variable manifestations of the small family, the extended family or lineage, and clan ties.

Marriage influences natality in the sense that, in a stable society it is the married couples (or family units) who, guided broadly by cultural norms, determine how many children each woman should contribute to the population (quantitative aspect), maintain these children physically, and socialize them to full maturity, as responsible citizens (qualitative aspect). Hence in times of hardship in a community or at national level (e.g. the great depression of the 1930's) fewer marriages take place and fewer children are born; and when there is abundance, there are more marriages and more children are born into the society. This observation only holds in so far as catastrophe and abundance are mutually exclusive. For when they coexist as

*This chapter is reproduced with major modifications and due permission from ABBIA No. 38-39-40, May 1982 pp.273-97.

was the case during the early phase of the Biafran War, different trends can emerge. The Biafran War, despite its negative impact on the Nigerian economy benefitted a few segments of the population. Indeed windfalls and the rapid social mobility in the military ranks were reported to have led to an explosion of marriages and a baby boom in Eastern Nigeria.

Whenever a society begins to disintegrate, there emerges an increasing number of people who no longer observe the cohesive cultural norms and traditional marriage and child socialization practices. Such people often include men who either reject or postpone marriage for very long, as well as successful and ambitious women who prefer to raise children out of wedlock. Dissatisfaction with traditional gender roles, or circumstantial difficulties or failures in coping with them could also account significantly for the increasing size of this group. For these women, it has been observed that their total fertility rate which is an index of their total family performance, or the number of offspring achieved during their reproductive years, is much lower than that of women in formal traditional marriage settings.

In the light of the foregoing, the present author decided to carry out, using a prospective study design, an investigation of nuptiality in the Jakiri and Mbandjock districts of Cameroon. Such a longitudinal survey, it was hoped, would throw some light on the socio-cultural factors affecting fertility in general, as well as guide one in advising on the formulation of social and population planning policies and in the selection of appropriate intervention strategies needed to solve the serious infertility problem in parts of our nation.¹

The general objective was to relate marital patterns with the fertility trends of the study communities and to try to explain their variations in terms of marital behavioural differences observed in the two districts.

Methodology of the Study

With the foregoing general framework, the present author selected two demographically contrasting communities in rural Cameroon, namely, Jakiri community with a reasonably acceptable population growth rate, and Mbandjock with an identified population density and a growth rate problem. The study was conducted from June 1976 to June 1978, that is, over a two year period.

The study design consisted of a quick cross-sectional survey on the number, composition, and characteristics of the population in these communities, followed by a longitudinal survey during which vital statistics were collected in those communities. The latter consisted of the collection of

demographic data on vital processes (birth rates, death rates, fertility/sterility rate) on migration (emigration, immigration) and on marriage.

To ensure consistency and the collection of high quality data, adequate training was given to the field data collectors or surveyors, and strict supervision and sustained education was ensured by the employment of supervisors, people with a higher basic education, who received the same training as the field data collectors as well as additional training on educational supervision and continuous evaluation techniques. These supervisors were each supplied with an autocycle to facilitate their work. Whereas they lived in the central village which was the study base, the other surveyors were permanent residents of their own villages, and each lived in his or her village throughout the entire duration of the study.

A pilot study for a period of one month was organized during which the surveyors completed training in the field itself. Thereafter they resumed the actual data collection by July 1976. To prevent errors of omission or under-registration of vital events, one worker was assigned to a village or a group of villages with approximately 1,000 inhabitants.

In Mbandjock, which is rather sparsely populated, each worker was assigned a population of about 500. Considering the overall methodological strategy, this was certainly an improvement on the multiple passage method of vital registration in which data collectors make periodic tours of the community (e.g. once every three or six months) to collect information.²

Characteristics of Nuptiality in Jakiri in 1976-8

Marriage Rates

During 1976-77, which was the first year of the study, there were 139 marriages, and during the second year, there were 98 marriages in the Jakiri district. The total number of marriages was therefore 237. The marriage rates in the first year was therefore 7.3 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, and for the second year it was 5.2 per 1,000 inhabitants. Thus the recorded marriage rate for the two years gave an average figure of 6.3 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants per year.

There is however some evidence suggesting the possibility of an under-registration during the second year as a result of reduced supervision following the sudden death of one of the field supervisors. This observation is further strengthened by the fact that a slight concomitant drop for all other registrations was also noted.

Distribution of Marriages by Village of Husband (Table 1)

In general, although the larger villages tended to have the higher number of marriages, some of the smaller villages like Banyam, Tan, and Nto'ti had higher rates.

Vekovi alone recorded 42 marriages during the two-year period and thus scored approximately 18 percent of the 237 marriages. Waynama' came second place with 35 marriages or 15 percent; Jakiri central village came third with 20 marriages or 8 percent; Ngkar came fourth with 17 marriages (7 percent), closely followed by Kinsenjam with 16 marriages (7 percent).

Analysing the marriage rates in Jakiri by individual villages, it was found that Tan achieved the highest rate with 29.3 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, Banyam came second place with 26 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants, Waynama' came third place with 16.5 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants in two years. The average rate for the Jakiri district was 12.48 marriages in two years or 6.24 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants per year (See Table 1). As stated earlier, most of the villages with high rates were the smaller ones, while the three biggest villages had low rates of marriage.

Table 1: Distribution of Marriages by Village of Husband (1976/78)

No	village	Frequency of marriage	% distribution	Population	Marriage per 1000 population
1	Nkar	17	7.17	3.444	4.94
2	Jakiri	20	8.44	2.488	8.04
3	Vekovi	42	17.64	2.700	15.56
4	Wainamah	35	14.77	1.677	20.87
5	Ntseimbang	8	3.38	559	14.31
6	Kintsemjam	16	6.75	1.174	13.63
7	Shiy	11	4.88	1.093	10.06
8	Ndzerem	7	2.95	578	12.11
9	Kwanso	8	3.38	526	15.21
10	Wasi	4	1.69	415	9.64
11	Ntoti	12	5.06	609	19.70
12	Tan	12	5.06	410	29.27
13	Ber	3	1.27	559	5.37
14	Ntur	6	2.52	362	16.37
15	Mbokam	1	0.41	167	5.99
16	Mantum/Kifom	9	3.80	559	16.10
17	Noi	13	5.49	790	16.46
18	Mbokija	1	0.42	364	2.75
19	Banyam	9	3.80	345	26.09
20	Kiluum	3	1.27	175	17.14
	Total	237	100	18.995	12.48

January	24	10.13
February	10	4.22
March	7	2.95
April	14	5.91
May	14	5.91
June	19	8.02
July	33	13.92
August	15	6.33
September	27	11.39
October	20	8.44
November	28	10.97
December	26	11.81
Total	237	100

Table 2 shows that in the Jakiri district, marriages occur throughout the year. However there appeared to be relatively fewer marriages during the months of February, March, April and May. These are months of scarcity in the Bui Division, and the largely farming population is usually occupied with cultivation. Thus scarcity of food can be considered as a possible contributory factor (and probably the most influential one) to the low marriage frequency during these months.

Another possible factor which could also partially account for these monthly variations has to do with religion. Indeed, as the majority of the people are Christians, it is reasonable to suppose that passion tide or the season of Lent which occurs in February and March could contribute to the paucity of marriages in this season.

The month of August also experienced a sharp drop in the frequency of marriages. This month coincides with the peak of the rainy season

(Tonngking) during which motorable roads are almost impassable. The harvest of corn, (maize) which is the staple food begins in September in the District and there is abundant food from that time onwards till new Year (January). Accordingly, there are many celebrations (including weddings) which are associated with high rates of food consumption. As for July, the peak incidence during that month coincides with the potato and bean harvest, and it is also a period when the villagers are less occupied with farm work.

Distribution of Couples by Age-Group and By Sex

The total number of marriages recorded during the study period was 237. There was no case in which one husband took in two wives at the same time. So there were 237 males and 237 females, making a total of 474 individuals. (See Table 3). When these individuals were studied in terms of their age distribution it was found that the mode or the peak was 15-19 years age-group contributing 129 persons or 27 percent of all newly married individuals. This was closely followed by the 20-24 year age-group, which numbered up to 127 persons i.e. close to 27 per cent. After that the frequency decreased progressively with increasing age, except for the 55-59 year age-group where a sudden increase was noted with 14 persons of that age-group marrying. It is also interesting to point out that two persons of 10-14 year old were married and these two were both females. At the other extreme, it is to be remarked that two males in the age-group 65 years and above also got married.

Considering the husbands alone, the youngest 8 were found in the 15-19 year age-group (3 percent), and males from all age-groups, except the 10-14 year category, contributed to the marriages.

Table 3. Distribution Of Married People By Age-Group And By Sex 1976 -1978

Age group	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
10 – 14	0	/	2	8.84	1	0.42
15 – 19	8	3.38	121	51.05	129	27.26
20 – 24	49	20.68	78	32.91	127	26.79
25 – 29	69	29.11	26	10.97	95	20.04
30 – 34	41	17.30	3	1.27	44	9.28
35 – 39	19	8.02	3	1.27	22	4.62
40 – 44	14	5.91	2	0.84	16	3.36
45 - 49	11	4.64	1	0.42	12	2.53
50 – 54	7	2.95	1	0.42	8	1.69
55 – 59	14	5.91	0	/	14	2.95
60 – 64	3	1.26	0	/	3	0.63
65+	2	0.84	0	/	2	0.42
TOTAL	237	100	237	100	474	100
Percent	50	/	50	/	100	/

The peak or modal age for the males lay within the 25-29 year age-group, and accounted for 69 persons or 29 percent of all husbands. The next age-group was the 20-24 year, with 49 persons or 21 percent of all wedded males; then the other age-groups followed with a progressively decreasing frequency for increasing age except for the 55-59 year age-group where there was a rebound with 14 persons getting married.

Considering the females alone, they were seen to be marrying mostly between the ages of 10 and 25, as this age range accounted for 199 marriages or approximately 84 percent of all new marriages among females. Only 2 females went to marriage in the 10-14 year age-group. The mode lay in the 15-19 year age-group with 121 persons or 51 per cent of the 237 wives. This

was followed by the 20-24 year age-group with 78 contributions or 33 percent. Then came the 25-29 year age-group with 26 wives or 11 percent. Higher age-groups made very little contributions as can be seen from Table 3. After the age of 54 years, no female was reported to have contracted a new marriage. From the findings, one can safely conclude that by the time a woman in Jakiri had passed the age of 30, her chances of getting married were very slim, not to say, nil.

Further, from this analysis of the men and women, we thus found a great contrast between these two groups in their modal age at marriage. It became clear that young people in the district never marry their age cohorts of the opposite sex, the males preferring much younger women as their marriage partners and the females being matched to much older males as husbands.

We can also infer from these findings that the females are seen as being socially, psychologically and biologically mature much earlier than their male counterparts, hence they take on marriage responsibilities as early as between 15 and 19 years of age. Finally it is worth mentioning that although the giving away of daughters in marriage by the parents or marriage guardians is still widely practised, the choice of a husband is however increasingly becoming the responsibility of the daughters themselves.

The observation that the males marry much later than their female cohorts is consistent with the expectations of manhood in the Jakiri community. A young man must be psychologically mature and demonstrate a certain degree of socio-economic stability before he takes on a wife. He must detach himself from his parents, build himself a home, learn a trade and ensure a visible source of income, and participate voluntarily in the social and psychological competition of love-making and wife seeking. Only about 53 percent of the males in this study presumably completed these criteria before the age of 30. This situation imposes a generally large age difference between the husbands and wives. This aspect will be studied in detail later. Perhaps the chief determinant of mate selection in this instance is the sense of marriage responsibility rather than the so-called "love" which is common experience among the younger age cohorts. Putting it crudely, the males of 15-24 years can love but they prefer to defer marriage as most of them are not yet socio-economically secure; they are either students, apprentices or job seekers, with no home base in which to raise a family. They have to wait, work hard and wait for the younger female cohorts for their life partners.

Marriage Styles or Rituals Adopted In Jakiri

Like most rural districts of Africa, Jakiri district is still under the overwhelming influence of African traditions which shape or mould the life styles of its residents and affect their preferences. This is demonstrated by the fact that all the 237 marriages were first contracted by the traditional ceremonial rituals; out of that total, 206, that is 87 percent, did not yet feel the need for an additional confirmation by a different authority (the church, the courts). (See Table 4). Only 15 couples had proceeded to add on to it the Catholic religious rite to consolidate their marriage in accordance with their Catholic faith. One Protestant and ten Moslem couples had also gone ahead to their respective religious bodies to seek further confirmation.

Two couples combined the Catholic religious and court (civil registration) rituals to consolidate their union. In only three cases did three couples declare that they had contracted a court marriage to further validate their union already sanctioned by the customs of their people.

We must, however, indicate at this point that the practice of using several channels to confirm one's union is quite common, and with the study design used in this survey it was not easy to collect complete statistics of all subsequent confirmations since, once a couple had been recorded as validly married through a given conventional institution, a special follow-up was not mounted to record other subsequent confirmations. However there is evidence that this activity went on as we will see in a subsequent section of this study when we match the husbands and wives by their religious affiliation.

In conclusion, we can only state that traditional methods of contracting and celebrating marriages involving reciprocities between two descent groups, appeared to precede religious considerations in the establishment of new households in the district. As we saw civil registration is rare and it appears to confer few or no material advantages to rural farming populations who are neither entitled to family allowances nor enjoy individual ownership of property.

Table 4. Marriage Ritual Style Adopted in Jakiri as Observed in 1976/77- 1977/78

Marriage style	Frequency	Percentage
Traditional	206	86.62

Traditional+Catholic	15	6.30
Traditional+Moslem	10	4.20
Traditional+Court	3	1.27
Traditional+Persbyterian	1	0.42
Total	237	100

Type of Marriage Unions (See Table 5)

Among the 237 couples marrying within the period of our study, 129 were in monogamous unions (54 percent), and 108 were in polygamous unions (46 percent). It is probable that some of the 129 monogamous couples will become polygamous in future as well as it is possible that some polygamous unions could be reduced to the monogamous state later on.

Polygamy is therefore still accepted in the Jakiri district.

This is another traditional aspect of nuptiality which ignores the Christian precept on monogamy. The Moslem religion which has a stronghold in Jakiri district contributed significantly to this situation. Indeed several Nso' people have adopted the Moslem religion for its polygamous system of marriage. In addition, it must not be forgotten that the Cameroon law allows for polygamy. One consequence of this diversity of acceptable marriage styles is the almost 100 percent marriage rate of adult women—a strong fertility factor. This situation is well described in the section on fertility in the comprehensive vital statistics Survey report of which this is only a part.

Table 5. Types Of Marriage Unions In Jakiri In 1976-78

Type	Frequency	Percentage Distribution
Monogamy	129	54.43%
Polygamy	180	45.57%
Total	237	100

Characteristics of the Husbands

Previous Marital Status of the Men (See Table 6)

Among the 237 newly married husbands, 129 were “first timers” (54 percent), one was divorced (0,4 percent), and 107 were already married (45 percent). With such close proportions of single and married men competing for wives, one would expect to find very few “free” women in Jakiri district. This is in fact the case, and prostitution is a rare phenomenon in Jakiri. One would also expect a high divorce rate since the chances of getting a new husband were high, but our findings do not indicate so. They reveal, rather, very high remarriage rate for the few divorcees that were reported.

According to the Nso’ marriage system which prevails in this district, once a woman has been formally given in marriage, her child-bearing capacity belongs to the family of the husband and she cannot easily completely divorce from it. If she abandons the marriage home and proceeds to make children outside with subsequent partners, those children belong to the first husband who completed the marriage formalities. Even if he should die, his brothers and other next of kin will claim these children as of right. This practice is further reinforced by the fact that the parents of a girl will not accept marriage gifts and services twice on the same girl. Traditional marriage of the commonest type (*fo e mol*) establishes a bundle of reciprocal relations, in the past including the bridegiver’s right to dispose of the first-born daughter of the marriage in a system of deferred exchange (*siir-e bam*). As a rule there is no bride-price of the lump-sum variety, so the outlays and services on the husband’s side are very difficult to calculate and refund, and scarcely ever are.

By their very nature, marriage transactions are an exchange of confidence between two families, and material gifts are only a part of them. If a wife dies prematurely from natural causes, the family of the wife can give a substitute wife to care for the children of the deceased as well as to continue to consolidate the existing inter-family or inter-lineage relations. The bridal gifts on a girl are seldom received by the direct parents of the girl but rather by grand-parents or other senior titled relatives who exercise the prerogative of collecting bridal gifts and receiving services in respect of all the daughters of the lineage, and by other relatives, especially those who contributed considerably to the rearing and the socializing of the girl.

Table 6. Previous Marital Status Of Newly Married Males

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Ever Singel	129	54.43
Divorced (single)	1	0.42
Married	107	45.15
Total	237	100

Principal occupations of the husbands

Among the 237 husbands, 188 or 84 percent stated that their principal occupation was farming; 12 were cattle-raisers (5 percent); 10 were office workers (4 percent); 9 were traders (4 percent); 4 were construction workers (2 percent); 2 were traditional medicine-men and 2 were labourers. (See Table 7).

Table 7. Principal Occupation Of Husbands

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farmer	188	83.55
Cattle-raiser	12	5.06
Office worker	10	4.22
Trader	9	3.80
Construction Worker	4	1.69
Labourer	2	0.84
Traditional Doctor	2	0.84
Total	100	
	237	

Almost all the men (89 percent) belong to the primary sector of the economy, that is, engaged in earning a living by extracting or harvesting natural wealth in its crude form. These include farmers, cattle-grazers, and herbalists. Two percent (4 construction workers) belong to the industrial sector, 4 percent (9 traders) to the commercial sector, and another 4 percent (10 office workers) to the service sector.

Religion of the Husbands

Table 8 shows that 59 percent of the men were Catholic; 42 percent were Presbyterian; 4 percent Baptist; 26 percent Moslem; and 3 percent animist. These figures reflect the relative proportions of the different confessional populations in the district. Thus the Catholic faith is the most widely adopted, and the Moslem religion is the second most widely accepted and practised. However, when we think of the relatively high proportion of polygamous unions found in this study (See Table 5) it would appear logical to conclude that the Catholic Church, although successful in getting larger numbers of followers, is not deeply influencing the cultural practices of the people of Jakiri district. Whether this hypothesis is true or not remains to be verified and could be the subject of another study.

In general, Jakiri is a theistic society, and all the people believe in some form of Supreme Being or God. The name animist had been retained for those who belong style of worship.

Table 8. Religion of Husbands

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Catholic	141	59.47
Baptist	9	3.80
Presbyterian	99	41.77
Moslem	62	26.16
Animist/Pagan	6	2.53
Total	237	100

Educational Status of the Husbands

Table 9 indicates that 34 percent of the men were illiterate, 60 percent had some primary school education, about 5 percent had some secondary education, and less than 1 percent had obtained either some high school or some university education.

Table 9. Educational Level Of The Husbands

Years in School	Frequency	Percentage	Level of Education
0-2	81	34.18	Illiterate
3-8	143	60.34	Primary School
9-14	11	4.64	Secondary School
14+	2	0.84	High School/University
Total	237	100	

Languages Spoken by the Husbands

The investigators were also interested in the means of verbal communication in Jakiri. It was found that 13 percent of the men spoke only one language; 51 percent spoke 2 languages; 33 percent spoke 3 languages; and 7 percent of the husbands could speak 4 languages (See Table 10).

The predominant language of the Jakiri district is Lam Nso' which was spoken by 94 percent of the newly married men (See Table 11). About 61 percent spoke pidgin and 28 percent could speak Hausa or Fulfulde. English was spoken by 75 men (that is, 32 percent), French by only 5 percent of the husbands, and the other rare and unclassified languages were spoken by 5 percent of the husbands.

This diversity of languages is by no means excessive, and Jakiri can virtually be considered as one of the more homogenous societies of Cameroon with 94 percent speaking the major language.

The study of the linguistic capacity of groups in a given community and in this case Jakiri, is very important as it gives an indication of the potential of that community to receive information from other cultures. It is to be noted that 61 percent could speak Pidgin.

Table 10. Number of languages spoken by the Husbands

Number	Frequency	Percentage
4 languages	17	7.14
3 languages	78	32.76
2 languages	121	50.82
1 languages	31	13.08
Total	237	100

Table 11. Specific Languages Spoken By Husbands

Languages	Frequency	Percentage
Lamnso'	223	94.09
Pidgin	144	60.76

Hausa/Fulfulde	66	27.85
English	75	31.65
French	12	5.06
Others	12	5.06

Characteristics of the Wives

Place of Origin of the Wives

As marriage tends to be exogamous for women in Jakiri, the place of origin of the wives was investigated. In general it was found that 155 wives came from within the study district (49 percent). Their migration characteristic was therefore intra-district. Since the Jakiri district is strictly rural, the 105 wives from outside the district but from within Bui Division, constituted “inter-district” migrants.

Among these 105 women who constituted 44 percent of the newly married female population, 55 of them originated in the Kimbo’ urban area and moved out to marry and settle in the rural villages of the Jakiri district which is sometimes referred to as Dzeekwa’ (farming district of Nso’) to reflect both the fertility of the soil and the major occupation of its inhabitants. The migration characteristic of these 55 women was therefore “urban-rural”.

Fourteen of the wives were found to originate in some rural area outside the Bui Division but within the limits of the North West Province of Cameroon (8 percent). only 3 of these adventurous wives came from outside of the North West Province (1 percent), and their migration category is “inter-provincial”. Since we could not ascertain whether or not their actual place of origin was rural or urban, it was not therefore possible to categorise them in such specific terms. The general categories of origin are listed in table 12.

Table 12. Place Of Origin Of The Wives

Categories of Origin	Number	Percentage
From within study district	115	48.52
From outside study district (but in Bui division)	105	44.30

Outside Bui but N/W Province	14	8.02
From outside N/W Province	3	1.26
Total	237	100

In general about 178 women or 75 percent could be described as “rural-rural migration”, and only 59 wives (originating in the urban collectivities of Kimbo’, Bamenda, Foumban and Buea), or 24 percent, could be categorised as urban-rural migrants.

Marital Status of the Women Married in 1976-8

Among the 237 new wives, 217 of them were ‘single’ before their marriages that took place between 1976 and 1978 (91 percent), and the remaining 20 were divorced women (9 percent). (*See* Table 13). In an earlier section of this Chapter we mentioned that divorce is difficult to achieve in Nso’ tradition. It is also similarly difficult for a researcher to establish divorce which tends to be an insidious and protracted process. That is, in Nso’ tradition, divorce is not marked by an event as dramatic or as sensational as a wedding which marks the formal beginning of the marriage status. In fact the word “divorce” with legal connotation, does not exist in Lamnso’. The Lamnso’ word in common use is “feha” which literally means “abandonment”. The causes of “abandonment” of the home, as volunteered by the women, have been fully discussed by the author elsewhere.

As the wave of “women’s emancipation” is progressively spreading to all parts of the world, cases of women abandoning their traditional marriages have also been reported for rural African districts like Jakiri. Religion has also contributed significantly to this trend. The Christian churches discourage the traditional African practice of “arranged” marriages, child-marriages in particular, and have been known to confirm, by religious ritual, new unions of run-away wives to new husbands. In other words the multiplicity of the marriage styles which are socially accepted in religious social groups of Jakiri permit the people to ignore the sanctions and taboos associated with each style of marriage. Nothing prevents a young woman, for instance, from abandoning her traditionally arranged husband and taking on a new husband of her choice by the civil registration method. In that case her parents will be expected to provide a substitute wife or give compensation in some degree for the cost of gifts, services, bridal expenses, and maintenance incurred, if

possible. If she further wishes, she could divorce in court later and marry another man in the church.

However, in some urban areas of Cameroon the priests and pastors would insist on a civil registration before performing the religious marriage rite for a couple. If their intention is to confirm that the couple have accepted the monogamous option, the whole procedure tends to challenge the absolute nature of Christian marriage ritual and diminishes it to a mere blessing since the priests themselves, by such insistence, recognize that the marriage has already been completed in court. Catholic religious marriage, of course, is regarded as lasting for life, and if a woman runs away from a Catholic husband, she can only hope to be a concubine in her new relationship because the church scarcely ever grants divorce., Thus, whereas Catholic marriage is almost a life insurance, the others, and particularly the Moslem religious marriages, are not so considered.

Traditional marriage is much more flexible and the exchange of gifts can be a lifetime process. However within the traditional system, two people of the opposite sex can decide to live together and raise a family without any formalities. In this case they are, in practice, husband and wife; but they could still be the subject of ridicule in their society. At a convenient date they could decide to consolidate their union by the payment of bridal gifts which, when accepted, become the parental endorsement of traditional marriage for their unions. This was to close the loopholes for divorce accepted in the different sub-cultures within the Jakiri society, and thus to consolidate their marriage by several accepted norms. Marriage is still a serious affair in Jakiri and people want to have their children in secure marriage unions.

Table 13. Previous Marital Status of Wives

Status	Number	Percentage
Single	217	91.14
Divorced	20	8.86
Total	237	100

Principal Occupation of the Wives

Of the 237 housewives 225 stated that their principal occupation was farming (95 percent) in addition to their being housewives. Nine declared

that they were just full-time housewives (4 percent); two were office workers; and one new wife was a seamstress. (See Table 13).

This demonstrates clearly that rural women and especially the housewives, are generally self-employed, and are thus engaged in self-reliant development. Only two women in this series were salaried workers (less than 1 percent). This finding suggests a need to introduce elementary home technology into this area so that a larger proportion of women can take on other occupations besides farming during slack periods so as to make the locality more self-sufficient by a diversified economy.

Table 14. Principal Occupation Of The New Wives

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	225	94.94
Housewife (full-time)	9	3.80
Office Worker	2	0.84
Seamstress	1	0.42
Total	237	100

Religious Affiliation of the Wives

The wives were studied for their religious affiliation. It was found that 141 of the 237 women were Catholics (59 percent); 26 percent were Moslem; and the Presbyterians represented 8 percent. There were 9 Baptists (4 percent); and only 2.5 percent of animist wives in Jakiri district.

Educational Attainment of the Wives

One hundred and sixty-two of the two hundred and thirty-seven wives marrying between 1976 and 1978 had obtained some primary school education (68 percent); five had obtained secondary or post-primary level education. There were seventy illiterates (30 percent); and no housewife with high school or university educational level. (See Table 15). As most of these women will normally present themselves in prenatal clinics within two years of their wedding, there is positive indication that health education posters

can be valuable teaching aids for this district with a large proportion of literate young mothers.

Table 15. Educational Level Of The Wives

Years in school	Frequency	Percentage	Level of education
0-2	70	29.54	Illiterate
3-8	162	68.35	Primary school
9-4	5	2.10	Secondary school
14+	0	0	High school/University
	237	100	Total

Matching Husbands and Wives by Religious Affiliation (See Table 17)

The influence of religion in mate selection was investigated for the Jakiri district among the 237 couples. It was found that there were 182 religiously homogeneous marriages, constituting 77 percent of all the marriages. Fifty-five marriages or 23 percent were therefore heterogeneous. The Catholics alone contributed 112 homogeneous marriages which constituted 62 percent of the total homogeneous marriages; the pagans, 0.84 percent; the Moslems, 29 percent; the Presbyterians, 4 percent, and the Baptists, 4 percent.

Table 16 shows quite a wide range of religious combinations among the couples. Catholic husbands married Presbyterian, Moslem and pagan wives. Pagan husbands were observed to marry Catholics, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Moslem wives. Moslem husbands were also recorded to have married catholic, Presbyterian and pagan wives. Presbyterian husbands also married Catholic, Moslem and pagan wives. No Baptist husband married a wife of another denomination, but 2 Baptist girls took pagans for their husbands. As the numbers are rather small one cannot draw general conclusions from this observation.

It is therefore evident that although most people prefer to marry partners with similar religious affiliation, occasionally other factors outside religion appear to play the decisive role, and religious affiliation then becomes less important.

Table 16. Matching Husband And Wife By Religious Affiliation To Jakiri 1976-8

Combinations	Frequency	Percentage
Catholic husband and catholic wife	112	47.26
Catholic husband and Presbyterian wife	5	2.11
Catholic husband and Moslem wife	2	0.84
Catholic husband and pagan wife	3	1.27
Pagan husband and catholic wife	9	3.80
Pagan husband and Presbyterian wife	1	0.42
Pagan husband and Baptist wife	2	0.84
Pagan husband and Moslem wife	5	2.11
Pagan husband and pagan wife	2	0.84
Presbyterian husband and catholic wife	11	4.64
Presbyterian husband and Presbyterian wife	8	3.38
Presbyterian husband and Moslem wife	2	0.84
Presbyterian husband and pagan wife	0	/
Presbyterian husband and Baptist wife	7	2.95
Total	237	100

Matching Husbands and Wives by Ethnic Group

Among the 237 couples, 214 couples were of Nso’ origin, and constituted therefore 90 percent of the marriages. The remaining 23 consisted of homogeneous and assorted ethnic mixtures predominantly from all over the North West Province of Cameroon. It is to be noted that the foreign husbands living in the district tended to marry girls from their own ethnic group.

Hence we observed pure Meta', Fulani, Ngkwen, Pinyin and Bali couples in this series. The most remote combinations were Nso'/Bakweri, Nso'/Bali, Nso'/Bamum and Fulani/Nso' couples (See Table 17).

In summary, there were 222 pure or ethnically homogeneous marriages (93 percent) and the rest (or 7 percent) consisted of heterogeneous or ethnically mixed marriages. As it is expected that people of the same group share the same language and cultural practices, the trend here reflects the tendency towards cultural and linguistic affinity in mate selection.

Table 17. Matching Husband And Wife By Ethnic Group 1976 – 1978

Tribal combination	Frequency	Percentage
Husband Nso’ and wife Nso	214	90.30
Husband Nso’ and wife Bamum	2	0.84
Husband Nso’ and wife Baba’	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Noonni	1	0.42
Husband Oku and wife Nso’	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Oku	2	0.84
Husband Meta and wife Meta’	1	0.42
Husband Fulani and wife Nso’	3	1.27
Husband Fulani and wife Fulani	2	0.84
Husband Bali and wife Nso’	1	0.42
Husband Ngkwen and wife Ngkwen	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Bakweri	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Bamunka	1	0.42
Husband Pinyin and wife Pinyin	2	0.84
Husband Bali and wife Bali	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Babungo	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Babessi	1	0.42
Husband Nso’ and wife Wibuum	1	0.42
Total	237	100

Summary of Table 17: Tribal homogenous 93.23%
Tribal heterogenous 6.76%

Matching Husbands and Wives by Their Previous Marital Status
(See Table 18)

One hundred and twenty-two bachelors married one hundred and twenty-two spinsters and that constituted 51 percent of the couples. Ninety-

four married men got married to spinsters to enlarge their polygamous families (40 percent). Fifteen currently married men married thirteen divorced women as second or third other wives (5 percent). Seven bachelors married divorced women (3 percent), and one divorced man married a divorced woman (0.4 percent). Thus 9 percent of the newly married women were divorced women. Polygamy is well accepted in the Jakiri society, constituting about 45 percent in our series.

Table 18. Matching Husband and Wife By Previous Marital Status

Husband's status	Wife's Status		
Single	Single	122	51.48
Married	Single	94	39.66
Married	Divorced	13	5.49
Single	Divorced	7	2.95
Divorced	Divorced	1	0.42
Total		237	100

Matching Husband and Wife by Principal Occupation

Unfortunately, as most men and women are farmers in this district, the probability of farmers marrying each other is extremely high because they have no other choice. However, we analysed the couples by occupational combinations to assess the trends or occupational combinations among couples.

A total of one hundred and ninety-eight couples were both farmers (83 percent). Two couples were both office workers, and the rest were combinations. (See Table 19).

Table 19. Matching Husband and Wife By The Principal Occupation of Each of Them For 1976-8

Type of Combination	Frequency	Percentage
Farmer husband/farmer wife	198	83.54
Cattle-rearer husband/housewife	3	1.26
Cattle rearer husband/farmer wife	9	3.80
Trader husband/farmer wife	9	3.80
Native doctor/farmer wife	2	0.84
Office worker husband/office worker wife	2	0.84
Office worker husband/housewife	6	2.53
Teacher husband/seamstress wife	1	0.42
Teacher husband/farmer wife	1	0.42
Construction worker husband/farmer wife	4	1.69
Labourer husband/farmer wife	2	0.84
Total	237	100

Summary: 200 couples with similar occupation: 84%
Mixed occupations: 16%

Matching Husband and Wife by Age

When the 237 couples were matched for their ages it was found that the husband and wife were of equal ages in only six cases (2.5 percent); the wife was older than her husband in only 7 cases (3 percent); and the husband was older than his wife in 224 cases or 94 percent. (see Table 20).

The 224 cases in which the husbands were older than their wives were further investigated for the size of the age differential between the couples, using 5 years age difference intervals. The difference range was 1 to 50 years.

Table 20 shows that in 72 couples the husbands were older than the wives by 5-9 years which was the modal interval (32 percent). The true mode was 7 years. The next difference interval was the 1-4 years with 51 couples (23 percent). It can be observed from the table that as the age difference intervals increased so also did the frequency of husbands who were at least 50 years older than their wives. Since the younger wives in these series were 17 years old, these husbands were marrying at about 67 years of age. Of course this was not their first marriage, and it is probable that their new wives were of the same age as their grand-daughters born of the first wife. If we accept the female generation time to be 17 years in Jakiri, these husbands were marrying women who were 3 generations behind their first wives. The culture and the tradition of Jakiri does not object to this kind of marriage. For an adult woman is an adult woman and she can marry any viable man of any age. similarly, a viable man can marry any woman of any age who agrees to stay with him.

In general 45 percent of husbands were at least 10 years older than their wives. About 11 percent of husbands were at least 30 years older than their wives. The mean was 11.3 years, for the two years of study. It was 12.5 years for 1976/77 and 9.6 years for the year 1977/78.

Table 20. Distribution Of Husbands According To Age-Difference Intervals Above The Wives In Jakiri In 1976-8

Age Difference	Frequency	Percentage
1-4	51	22.77
5-9	72	32.14
10-14	37	16.52
15-19	15	6.70
20-24	13	5.80
25-29	13	5.80
30-34	13	5.80
35-39	4	1.80
40-44	4	1.80
45-49	0	-
50+	2	0.89
Total	224	100

Summary: - The mode or most popular age-difference interval was 5-9 years with 72 cases or 32 percent.

- About 45 percent of the husbands were at least 10 years or more older than their wives

- About 10 percent of husbands (24 cases) were at least 30 years older than their wives.

- The average age difference between husband and wife was 11.3 years.

Discussion - The “Marche” Or Marriage Market

Apart from the socio-demographic factors which we have analysed in the preceding sections of this article, there are still hundreds, even thousands, of other factors which influence family formation in Jakiri and Mbandjock.

In fact the study of the epidemiology of nuptiality (permanent mate selection and family formation) anywhere in general requires a pluridisciplinary team because the study investigates the entire human society and how it survives in the face of all types of influences, some of which are promotive while others are inhibitive to the survival and well-being of mankind.

These factors which” influence and even determine the mating of adult males and females, are many; there is also a bewildering number of their combinations in twos, threes or more, to operate together to effect the formation of a family. In fact it might be truer to say that no two people ever form a family for only one reason. In other words, families are always formed for a combination of reasons. Often the prominent factors of attraction and cohesion are obvious and identifiable, but quite often also, they could be obscure. The true test of the genuineness of these cohesive forces is the subsequent stability and success of the union.

The concept of the “marche” or marriage market represents the perplexing complexity of transactions which pass between individuals and among groups of persons in society before a marriage union is formed. In the urban societies of Cameroon which are generally a fusion of several traditional ethnic cultures with one another and with foreign and international culture elements, the dynamics of the marriage “marche” of today pose a really formidable task to analyse with any clarity and certainty.

Certain African Traditions

In many of our African societies where descent-group interests and alliances still play a decisive role in marriage affairs, cultural norms demand that every adult male have a wife and every adult woman a husband. In such a culture, societal pressure tends to push young people to marry rather long before they have contemplated what marriage involves, the extent of individual human commitment, investment, and the responsibility required to sustain a marriage. In such societies also, the customs and traditions do promote and preserve the stability of the marriage unions for community good. Indeed, at one extreme, it could be said of some societies that it is the group that marries and not the individual couples. Where such a custom

prevails, the couples are in effect merely playing the role of principal actors. What is perhaps prominent is the absence of love and courtship as prerequisites for pairing marriage couples. An adult female is just handed over to a man who is considered either in need of a wife or who is ready to perform the function of a husband for the common good of the society. They learn to live together later. society builds in social privileges and guarantees for the viability of such unions. In such societies polygamy flourishes as an institution in spite of the apparent or conceivable conflicts that outsiders from other cultures imagine with aversion. The major transactions in such a “marche” are simply those of arranging the pairing of adult males and females who are deemed to be capable of marrying.

Therefore all adults constitute the marriage market commodities widows and divorcees are usually few because once married the woman’s offspring, irrespective of their real father, belong to the family of the official husband. Loss of husband by death does not always release the surviving wife into the public market since wife inheritance is practised. ownership of children is therefore a question of right by social criteria not necessarily or exclusively by the criterion of biological origin. In a wider and practical sense, children belong to a family, lineage or the society, and not to the parents who gave them birth.

In this context, we can identify carefully built-in forces of coercion and compulsion playing an important role in family formation. such are the dynamics and the style of the so-called “arranged marriages”, which are fast diminishing in our urban society in the face of increased economic individualism and the women’s emancipation movement which is fostered by the introduction of foreign human rights legislation into the emerging African legal systems. It is true that many African languages, on account of the above concept of marriage and family formation, do not have a word for “divorce” in their vocabulary. There was simply no provision in their custom for the permanent separation of a married couple or two married lineages by the recognised process which we now call “divorce”. The closest terms in common use in Nso’ culture, refer to the lighter notions or situations of ‘separation’. The Nso’ refer to a wife having abandoned her home (*kilo*) for a varying length of time. She, at no time ever loses the right to return to that home to which she has been permanently assigned by her marriage guardians. .If her parents were directly responsible for such departure, they are expected to give another wife in compensation. If she was an excellent wife and died prematurely from natural causes in her exile, she should be compensated for with her sister or relative in order to perpetuate and consolidate the alliance of the two lineages or extended families.

The so-called “dowry” or exchange of goods for a wife is an important part of the transaction in the marriage market in Africa. Marriage transactions are extremely complex and vary with the different ethnic groups in Cameroon, ranging from gift exchange and bride-service to purchase-marriage, mainly a cash transaction, with many intermediate situations. For example, in some societies the “dowry” is paid before the “wife”, for whom it is paid, is even born. When the daughters of the recipient family grow, anyone of them could then be given away in marriage to the family of the donors. She could be the wife of the lineage head or his brother, or one of his sons.

Where love and courtship practices are already stepping in, it is the girl who indicates her would-be husband to her parents and then the family of this future husband begins to pay the token gifts or, in some ethnic groups the standard bride price. Once the “dowry” is paid, it becomes binding on the young woman to remain faithful to the husband because the payment is an indication of engagement or the strong commitment of two persons or extended families. In effect the payment of “dowry” is synonymous with marriage. Cases are rare where it may be refunded. In fact in the rare case where someone insists on the refund of his “dowry” due to prolonged desertion he usually indicates, or it is implied, that he wants his wife returned to him or a substitute wife given.

In some tribes of Cameroon there is provision for the return of the “dowry” or bride-price and there is customary legal procedure to this effect. The return of such releases the woman from her former marriage commitment and a new dowry can be paid on her for a new marriage. Cases have been known where one woman serially married four husbands in her life time. Such societies are those which support a sort of serial polyandry and the children of such a woman can belong to the series of husbands (or families) who ever married her. Naturally extreme individualism is a chief characteristic of such ethnic groups.

Marriage for love is the catch phrase in the parlance of today’s youth who sell in the “marche”. What is unfortunate about this popular phrase is the vagueness and the impression of the operative word “love”. Love could mean strong admiration for someone of the opposite sex, a strong feeling of sympathy, a strong feeling of gratitude, or even an impulse to arrange an attachment to someone admired. It could mean free intimate interaction between two people of the opposite sex and this may or may not imply romantic exchanges and sexual intercourse. Love could mean a strong desire and willingness for two persons to live together and produce children (or

otherwise). It could be a seasonal infatuation or a long lasting affair. It could be superficial or a deeply felt and permanent sentimental commitment.

In emerging African societies, marriage for love seems to be gaining ground. But it has yet to be tested through several generations for it to be the norm in African cultures. Of course, love as an important variable must contest its influence with the other strong factors such as religion, ethnicity, geography, language, occupation, age, income, race, colour, to mention a few. These other factors while operating on their own right in the “marche” can and often do seriously influence the opportunities of falling in love.

In conclusion, I would strongly recommend repeated sociological investigations into societies like ours which are changing their patterns of family formation in the wake of rapid but uneven socio-economic and cultural development.⁴

Endnotes

1. Daniel Noni Lantum, *population Dynamics of Rural Cameroon and its Public Health Repercussions*, (A socio-Demographic Investigation of Infertility in Mbandjock and Jakiri Districts), public Health Unit, University centre for Health sciences (CUSS) Yaounde, October 1979 (mimeo).

2. Norman B. Ryder, “Methods of measuring the family life cycle”, in *proceedings of the International population Conference*, Mexico, 1977, pp. 219-228.

3. Male farming activity could be combined with other activities, *vide* Fjellman and Goheen, ‘A Prince by any other name,’ *American Ethnologist*, 11-13, 1984.

4. Since this paper was written there have been some tentative explorations into the ideology of family formation and gender relations, for example by some of the contributors to J-C. Barbier (ed.) *Femmes du Cameroun: Meres pacifiques, femmes rebelles*. ORSTOM-KARTHALA, Paris, 1985, and by contributors to the Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon, *Research Reports* 35/1989, African Studies Centre, Leiden.

Public Health Unit, University Centre for Health Sciences (CUSS) Yaounde, October 1979 (oneo).

The Fon's Wives In Nso'

PAUL N. MZEKA²

Introduction

The part of the palace occupied by *vikiy nto'*, literally wives of the palace,¹ is called *nsan* or *la' vikiy nto'*. The latter means home for women of the palace and the former means passage.

The Fon of Nso' has many wives. In 1913, Father Emonts found that the Fon then, Ngga' Bi'fon, had slightly over 300 wives and female dependents; Mbingkar Mbinglo (Sam III) had about 100. But the present Fon at the time of my survey had 89 wives. One reason for the diminishing numbers may be the equally diminishing significance of *Nto' Nso'* as an administrative, social, economic and political centre of the Nso' state. This diminishing importance is a product primarily of the modern administrative set-up and changing values. One who had a daughter or a relative who was a *wiiy nto'* (Fon's wife) could easily through the agency of the daughter get his case or complaint listened to by the Fon far more rapidly, if not far more easily. Not long ago, this could make a lot of difference. To have any connection with royalty was by itself socially prestigious.

Again, any member of a *wiiy nto'* family who sojourned at the capital was assured of his feeding. To the visitor at the capital, Kimbo', feeding in those bygone days was a great problem. There were no daily markets, no restaurants and no food stalls. A visitor in town depended on the generosity of his near or distant kin resident in the capital. Again, if one of the Fon's wives delivered and was sent to some village to nurse her baby, as is the custom up to the present, the compound where she stayed became a place of refuge. No one from the capital could enter such a compound for fear that he or she could be accused of bewitching the infant prince or princess.

² This chapter is taken, by kind permission, from Paul N. Mzeka's *The Core culture of Nso'*, Agawam, Mass., 1980, copyright by the author; he is a grandson of Fon Mapiri (1907-10). The material on which it is based was collected from informants between 1968 and 1977.

Persons sent-from the capital to capture people for compulsory services prevalent at the time of the German occupation and the early part of the British colonial rule, could therefore never enter such compounds. Villagers who were lucky enough to escape there were safe.

In traditional Nso' society, wives of *vibay* (great lords) and the Fon were completely nude except for strings of black fibre tied around the waist. They were expected to be scrupulously courteous and respectful. The public was equally expected to behave in like manner towards them. The popular view as to why they were nude is that nudity discouraged adulterers.

Row the *vikij nto'* are organized

In the present *Nto' Nso'* built, on the site of the old one which fire destroyed in 1959, houses on the *vikij nto'* sector are roughly in line with paths running between them, more or less from north to south. This contrasts with the previous pattern in which the houses had no discernible arrangement. Three, four or more wives who stay in one house under the leadership of the eldest *wiiy nto'*, belong to one of the five groups called *lav* which literally means 'House'. In fact, *lav* in this sense is a social unit. The five 'houses' are Lav Nso', Lav Ngkar, Lav Nsheelav, Lav Nggoran and Lav Ndzeen.³

Of these, only the first four still exist. Each *lav* is headed by a leader called *yeesum* which means mother of the farm. A *yeesum* is selected and installed by *yeela'* and *yaa woo nto'* (see below) after much investigation and consultation with the elder *vikij nto'* of the *lav* concerned, and also taking into consideration the wishes of the deceased *yeesum* who normally nominates a successor before she dies. A *yeesum* is chosen only from among the inmates of the *lav* that needs a *yeesum*. A *yeesum* is installed only on a Kiloovey which is the second day after the Nso' market day and in the *nggay*, the royal family hall. For a week she is rubbed with camwood supplied by the Fon. She is bathed, fed, and washed by the elders of the *lav* concerned. The *ayeesum* (plural) are seized and installed in the same manner that *afaay* (lineage heads) are. Sometime after installation, and like a lineage head, she goes to perform her *kitaayiy*, that is to salute the mother's father. She is accompanied for the occasion by members of her *lav* and persons from her father's compound who supply most of the things taken to the compound of her mother's father. During the *kitaayiy*, the mother's father arranges the day on which the new *yeesum* would go for her *kimbunfon*, which is the traditional salutation of the Fon.

When that day arrives, and accompanied by people from her mother's compound and from her mother's fathers' compound, she goes to *bun Fon* (pay homage to the Fon) before she settles down to the headship of her *lave*. These are the things a newly installed *faay* does, but unlike a *faay* a *yeesum* does not offer sacrifices and does not wear any insignia of office. The title of *yeesum* is for life.

Each *yeesum* takes care of her *lav* and is responsible for its discipline, growth and vitality. She organizes and supervises the inmates to receive the children of her *lav* (princes and other royals who are offspring of that *lav*) who come to *bun* or salute the Fon. If there was a princess or daughter of a prince or princess who belongs to her *lav* and was already mature, it was she who informed any of the *ataanto'* that it was time to give her away in marriage. When the girl was eventually given a husband it was her duty to supervise the marriage ceremonies. She made all the arrangements for escorting the girl to her husband, invariably a man of title. Before the girl was led to her husband who, most likely, she had never met and who equally might never have seen her, she was nourished, washed and camwooded for a week. During the week of preparations, the girl had her first experience of sexual adventure. She was 'allowed' to sneak out and stay the night with her lover. This tolerated act is called *toone nte'* and was practised not only by princesses but by most women two weeks or so before their marriage. (Might this explain why the first children used to be returned to their mother's patrilineage? A boy, if returned, was wholly absorbed into his mother's lineage but a girl was given out in marriage by the *faay* (head) of her mother's patrilineage). During the two weeks of preparation for marriage the girl's *nte'* (neighbourhood) lover provided the money that was expended in purchasing the groundnuts, sugar cane and meat that were lavishly consumed at such times. If someone was reckless enough to impregnate a princess before her betrothal,⁴ the lover was caught and sold.

In conjunction with the other *ayeesum* (plural), the *vikiy nto'* were organized to work the *sum fon* (Fon's Farm). In the farm, they worked in their *lav* groups under the supervision of their *yeesum*. The title *yeesum*, that is, mother of the farm, derives from this function.

For the working of *sum fon*, the *vikiy nto'* were joined by the wives of *nshiy se lav* (*ex-ngwerong* pages and palace attendants). These women had their own *ayeesum*: one for the *Ba'* women had to come from the village of Mba' and the other for the *Gham* women came from the village of Mbuluv. These were *ayeesum vee taa*, that is to say the *ayeesum* of the exterior to differentiate them from those of the palace. These two *ayeesum*, like their palace counterparts, are installed in the *nggay* by *yeela'* and *yaa woo nto'* and they follow the same

installation ceremonies as those of the interior. These, unlike those who reside in the palace, are assisted by two other women called *angywaang* (sing. *nggywaang*) *vee taa*. NOW, why have the *ayeesum vee nto*' no assistants like those of the exterior? The answer may lie in the fact that the wives of *nshiy se lav* whom the two outside *ayeesum* supervised during the working of the Fon's farm were dispersed all over the town. To inform and assemble them was considered too much for only two persons.

Apart from the five *ayeesum* (now four) there are two *vikiy nto*' of superior rank called *yaa woo nto*' (queen of the palace) and *yeela*' (mother of the compound); *yaa* and *yeela*' must come from *lav Nso*', that is to say they are always members of the group referred to as *lav Nso*' and the two must be pure Nso' in parentage. *Yaa woo nto*' is chosen by the Fon himself and installed by a *taanto*'. Her office is for life. On the other hand the title of *yeela*' is given by a new Fon to anyone of his wives who delivers the first princess by him. Their duties were:

To arrange and supervise the preparation by the *vikiy nto*' of the sacrificial fufu and soup. These are used for sacrifices by the Fon when he *eu wong*, that is to say when he sacrifices to the Earth on behalf of all the people, to plead both for their fertility and that of their land. In his sacrificial functions the Fon is assisted by *taanwong* and *yeewong*.

To serve as a link between the Fon and the four *ayeesum*. Orders and information may reach the *vikiy nto*' through *yaa* and *yeela*', who inform the four *ayeesum* and who in their turn inform the rest of the *vikiy nto*'. Anything the *vikiy nto*' want to collectively tell the Fon is passed through *yaa* and *yeela*'.

To select one of their numbers to go to bed with the Fon: a very enviable position considering the number of wives the *afon* (plural) had. In their position they could detect any of the Fon's wives who became pregnant without having at least once gone to bed with the Fon.⁵

To shave the Fon. The hair after shaving is collected and stored in a new raffia bag. The hair is buried with the Fon when he dies.

Yeefon

Of a unique position is the *yeefon* or queen-mother. When a prince is installed Fon and his mother is still alive she is installed as *yeefon*. But if she is dead, the new Fon chooses one of his daughters, as the Nso' say, *wan woo wun vito*, that is, a child of his intestines, and never, as some writers claim, a sister, and 'crowns' her as his queen-mother. Being queen-mother, she enjoys the singular privilege of sitting on a *kava*' (king stool) and of lying on a carved bed. She is a *yaa* (queen) by virtue of her being mother or holding the title of

mother of the Fon. A yaa who is a *yee fon* is accorded all the honour due to the Fon except the clapping of hands. Her funeral and death celebrations are like those of a Fon. Everybody who has to go bare headed when the Fon dies does so during her death celebrations. Though she is buried out of the palace, her memorial grave is marked by a stone in front of the palace family hall called *nggay*. In protocol, the queen-mothers take precedence over all the *vibay*.

She has no specific duties, but her title is hereditary. Those who succeed her are called *fenggay*, that is, of or belonging to the royal family hall. The title *fenggay* continues until the third successor. The fourth is called *yaa*. The title *yaa* is slightly inferior to that of *fenggay*. The many *ayaa* found all over Nso', except those who are *ayeenwong*, are successors of the former queen-mothers. A *yee fon* (except the real mother of the Fon), *fenggay* or *yaa* could be given out in marriage and formerly they were given only to notables. No marriage gifts were given to the Fon and the *yaa* or *fenggay* was allowed to leave her husband at any time if she so wished. When a *yaa* or *fenggay* had chosen her man, invariably a *kibay* (great lord) or *faay* (lord, lineage head) he would build a house behind his own for his wife of royal rank. She would sit and sleep at the right hand side of the house, called *kikiking*. Whenever her husband visited her extra-maritally, he would greet her like any other visitor, following the normal traditional etiquette of cupping the left hand, putting it to his mouth and saying '*yaa*'.

Like any other visitor, he would sit on the left side of the hearth, called *fe shwir*, but on a chair and not on a *kidang* (bamboo bench) where titleless visitors sat.

A *fenggay* or *yaa*, by virtue of being a queen-royal, has the right to wear the royal cloth called *kilanglang*. A *faay* who marries a *fenggay* or *yaa* may wear the royal cloth in his capacity as an escort-royal. He is said to *kur to' yaa*, that is to say he partakes in wearing yaa's royal cloth.

Recruitment of Fon's Wives

Each *lav* is increased or decreased according to the ability of its members to find and stigmatise with camwood little girls before or in their early teens to become future *vikiy nto'*. In fact one of the *lav si* (plural) has not only decreased in numbers of inmates, as the rest have, but has completely ceased to exist. This is as a result of death and lack of replenishment. The *lav* in question is *Ndzeen* whose last *yeesum* was a *wiiy nto'* called Yula from the village of Mbuluv.

The little girls conscripted were called *nshiy se lav*. That is, and literally, too, those who look after the house, or in other words, servants or pages. They were scrupulously trained in *nto*' traditional etiquette and were taught to be industrious. They did the most menial of the daily chores for their tutors. Their tutors of course were the *vikiy nto*' who found and camwooded them. They continued in this servant/trainee status until after the delivery of the first child. But in some cases where the relationship between the *wiy nto*' and *nshiy lav* was cordial, she continued to stay with her even up to her third child.

Her independence was demonstrated by the creation of her separate fire-place. She could create it in the same house where she stayed with her tutor or in quite a different house where there was room. She herself, even when still with the status of a *nshiy lav*, could also find and camwood girls to train. If she did this, she and her little trainee were under the control of her tutor.

If the eldest *wiy nto*' in an individual house died, the most senior in age among the members of the house (be they three, four, five etc., in one house) took over the headship of the house by transferring to cook in the deceased *wiy nto*'s fire-place.

The following were liable to recruitment as *vikiy nto*' (wives of the Fon):

Daughter of a man of *nshiy lav* status whose wife is a girl from a *duy* (extended royal clan), *mtaar* (commoner clan) or *nshiy lav* category family.

Daughter of a *mtaar* man who is married to a *duy* or *nshiy lav* girl.

Daughter of a *duy* man who is married to a woman of the *nshiy lav* category.

A girl who otherwise would not have been liable to conscription, but who was surrendered by her father to the palace in order to mitigate an otherwise grievous offence to the state. But she must not be of the royal clan.

Daughters of refugees.

Girls presented by tributary chiefs as a sign of respect and loyalty.

Girls presented by friendly chiefs to the Nso' palace.

Girls given as part of the 'Fon's bag' by those who *tang ngwerong*, that is, being initiated into the final state of the *yee ngwerong* club.⁶

As noted earlier, all these girls were recruited by the Fon's wives, be they of *nshiy lav*⁷ or of a *wiyy nto*' status. What happened if they made an error and camwooded and brought to the palace a girl who otherwise should not have been recruited? For example, a girl whose parents were both *dyy* or both *mtaar*. When the error was discovered the girl was given in marriage to a *nshiy lav* (*ngwerong* or palace page) but never to a prince. The children such a man fathered by this girl did not belong to him but to the *wiyy nto*' (Fon's wife) who had recruited her. If the *wiyynto*' had sons, the children would belong to her first son who could give out the girls in marriage or might even marry from among them. As for the boys, he took them as servants.

Sometimes (and not long ago) this was common. The *vikiy nto*' intentionally recruited girls meant eventually as wives for their relatives. Once girls were recruited, even when there was an error, they could never be returned to their parents.

The subsistence of the *vikiy nto*'

The Nso' Fon's wives subsisted largely through their own individual efforts. They grew their own food and fetched their own firewood. Salt, oil, and meat (the last a scarce delicacy up to the 1950s) were occasionally provided by the Fon, but generally they secured these things themselves.

The greatest assistance towards the subsistence of a *wiyy nto*' and her child or children came from her own family. If the family was near the capital, oil and salt were sent to her. Distant families usually gave to a *wiyy nto*' from their lineage a female collateral to give out to someone as a wife. From such a person she received much of the help she needed. If the family was large, she could be given two, three, even four girls to give out in marriage. The husband or husbands of such helped her in those activities which in the Nso' traditional society were reserved to the male. For example, clearing the farm, carrying home the harvested corn, and cutting wood. He could also help in getting her meat, oil and salt.

Usually, there were two persons from the same lineage in the palace. The male was a page of *ngwerong* called *nshiy lav* or a servant in the royal household called *nshiy lav faay*.⁸ The female was a *wiyy nto*'. When two persons were conscripted from the same lineage, the female fed the male and the male helped her with her errands and daily, male chores.

In the days when *nshwi* or tribute was paid by tributary chiefs the *vikiy nto*' and their children (princes and princesses) could receive help in the season of hunger from the stock supplied by these chiefs. Help also came from the population at large. Occasionally organizations, groups or lineages supplied

the palace with firewood. Every ex-page whether of *ngwerong* or of the Fon's residence was expected to contribute firewood to the palace once every year. In the hunting season, boys' brigades called *nggwa* hunted weekly for the Fon. Some of these things brought to the palace were given to the Fon's wives directly or indirectly through their children.

This self-supporting existence must not be regarded as being peculiar to a Fon's wife. In Nso's traditional society the subsistence of a family was largely the responsibility of the woman, not the man. Comparatively speaking, the *vikij nto* were better off than *vikij baa* (wives of *vibay*) and *vikij faay* (wives of lineage heads) for they had multiple sources of help to augment their individual subsistence efforts.

The Brook Club of the Palace

In the present *Nto* Nso at Kimbo, there is a brook that flows just below the houses of the Fon's wives. To *tang ndzev* was to be initiated into the club of the brook. Membership was limited to the junior wives of the Fon called *nshiy se lav* and to the male servants of the Fon's residence called *nshiy se lav se faay*. The chief purpose of the club appears to have been social. The idea appears to have originated from the *tang nto* ceremony which the *ngwerong* pages had. This was a ceremony of graduating those *ngwerong* pages who had completed their term of nine years' pageship. It was an occasion for great feasting for the *ngwerong* internees. The *vikij nto* must have envied this and eventually started theirs. A group of young *vikij nto* who had not yet been initiated were organized to be initiated on the same day, just as a group of *ngwerong* pages graduated on the same day.

Those who were to be initiated brought mud fish, other fish or meat and food. The male servants of the royal household, as noted earlier, could also be initiated. These males in the group of the initiates brought calabashes of mimbo.

It was an occasion for any *wij nto* to demonstrate the wealth and the support she could muster from her people. Most *vikij nto* tried to show that they came from large and well-to-do families by bringing a large quantity of mud fish, other fish, meat, and food. Choice to an office could be influenced by what the *vikij nto* considered to be the size and wealth of the candidate's family as portrayed by her affluence or lack of it on the occasion of *tang ndzev*.

The evening before the day of initiation, the banks of the brook referred to above were scrupulously cleaned up. A large area near the brook was thoroughly cleaned up for the feast. On the following day, the day of initiation, those to be admitted brought their contributions to the cleared

spot. When the food and drinks were all assembled, all members of the club assembled in two groups, the male group and the female group. Food was lavishly distributed and drinks served. There was no special ceremony to admit the new members, no music, no dancing, no speeches: but the groups ate and drank from mid-morning till dusk. Senior *vikiy nto'* who were no longer members could visit the brook and were usually sumptuously entertained. Whenever they did, they sat separately from the younger groups.

Endnotes

1. The Nso' people avoid any expression that would imply or create intimacy with the Fon. His sons and daughters are referred to as *won nto'* (children of the palace). His wives are *vikiy nto'* (women of the palace) and his servants *nshiy se lav* (attendants at the house or hall). But inanimate things are said to belong to the Fon. Thus we say *sum Fon* (Fon's farm), *ru' Fon* (Fon's raffia bush) and *ndzEiv Fon* which was the Fon's spring from which his water was carried.

2. Hawkesworth noted on p.47, paragraph 157 of his 1923 Bansa' Assessment Report that '... every year, it was customary for the Germans to send 3 or 4 messengers who would requisition 500 men to be collected to go down to Kumba and elsewhere... Two gangs of 500 each were taken annually for the task (labour in the plantations) and about one-fifth of the number usually died owing to the uncongenial climate'. Forced labour for the plantations was abolished in 1918.

3. To avoid confusion, I shall throughout refer to each of these five groups as *lay* instead of its English translation.

4. Betrothal here does not mean an engagement to marry but an official declaration that the princess has been given away in marriage. Before marriage, the princess and her would-be husband generally had not known each other and might never have met.

5. Some women spent all their child-bearing period without ever going to bed with the Fon. These ended up childless or went out with other men. And if such became pregnant, they were executed along with their lovers. This also accounts for the fact that many *vikiy nto'* had only one child. Sometimes when a *wiiy nto'* (singular) had stayed for long without an opportunity to go to

bed with the Fon, she would go to her people and ask for presents to give to *yaa* and *yeela*' so as to be accorded the opportunity. Such presents were usually meat, smoked fish, oil, salt, or food items.

6. In 1946 Kaberry found that, of the Fon's wives then, 23 were daughters of *nshiy se lay*, 2 were daughters of *ataanto*' and 10 were *dny* daughters. The rest were from other sources as enumerated above. The Fon had at this time about 100 wives (see p.36 of McCulloch et al., *Peoples of the Central Cameroons*, first edition, 1954, London).

7. A *wiy nto*' called *nshiy lay* must not be confused with a *ngwerong* or palace page. A Fon's wife who is still young is also a *nshiy laY*, that is, she is considered a servant in the royal house.

8. *Faay* here connotes the residence or 'great house' of the Fon.

Nto' Nso' And Its Occopants: Privileged Access And Internal Organisation In The Old And New Palaces³

B. CHEM-LANGHEE, VERKIJIKA G. FANSO
& E.M. CHILVER

Nso' and the fraternal chiefdoms of Oku and Mbiame now form the Bui Division of the North-West Province of Cameroon, which had a population of some 142,000 in 1976 and an area roughly corresponding to that of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. The earliest economic descriptions of the area are by Glauning (1905, 1906) and Hassert (1917). Its place in regional and long-distance trade in the nineteenth century has recently been treated by Warnier (1983).

A description of the Nso' palace (*nto' Nso'*) at Kumbo, of its occupants and their functions, and of the modes of privileged access to particular parts of it, requires a brief introduction to some of the terms we shall employ. The population of Nso' proper, excluding fraternal, tributary or refugee chiefdoms, was divided by Nso' themselves into four principal social categories: *won nto'* (sing. *wan nto'*), literally children of the palace; *duy* or members of cadet royal lineages; *mtaar*, free commoners; and *nsbeelav* (sing. *nsbiylav*), retainers. Slaves (*akwan*, sing. *kwan*), though they could aspire to promotion within the military clubs and hold positions of trust within their owners' households and mortuary societies, did not play any significant part in political organisation, as such. Their issue was assimilated into their owners' or wife-givers' lineages within one or two generations (Chem-Langhee, MS 1982).

The *won nto'* category now includes descendants of any ruler to the fourth generation through sons and to the third through daughters. At the fifth generation in the male line and the fourth in the female the progeny rank as

³ This chapter was first published in *Paideuma* 31(1985):151-81 and is reproduced here with some modifications by kind permission of the editor of this journal, Dr Beatrix Heintze.

duy. This category is further subdivided, principally into descendants in the male line, those 'of the palace salt', and *duy kekeng*, 'of acquisition', descendants of princesses married to commoner lords whose sons have succeeded to their father's lineage headship, title and eponym (Mzeka [1980] 33): behind the latter lies a system of princess marriage which we shall revert to. Assimilated to *duy* are the patricians of three leading councillors, allegedly founded by immigrant royals.

The *mtaar*, members of twenty-two dispersed commoner clans, are viewed as the descendants of those clan-heads who freely offered allegiance to the first rulers (*afon*, sing. *fon*) of Nso' at Kovvifem, its early capital, in return for special privileges. These included the retention of leopard pelts, freedom from retainer duties, a right of remonstrance, and, in the past, the exclusive right of their lineage heads to marry princesses. Moreover, successful divination, in matters affecting the welfare of the *Fon*, and in the preliminary stages of selecting a new *Fon*, was held to lie with the *mtaar*. The *Fon* must be the son of a *mtaar* mother.

In contrast with most chiefdoms to its west, the status of retainer in Nso' extended to all those with a liability to

service in the palace, and in the adjacent enclosure of the male regulatory society, *ngwerong*, as well as to those actually serving. Girls in this category could be claimed as wives of the *Fon* (*vikiy nto*', sing. *wiy nto*', literally women of the palace) and could be given by him in marriage to princes and retainers. Liability extended to those both of whose or one of whose parents is a *nshiyilar*; to those with a remote uterine connexion with the royal house, usually at the fifth or sixth remove; to children of refugees; to those presented as pages by tributary chiefs, or by men of rank seeking membership of the upper grades of *ngwerong* or *nggiri*, the latter the society of *won nto*' and *duy*; and finally by a few presented as fines by wealthy men in mitigation of offences, or themselves forfeited for entering the *ngwerong* inner sanctum (Kaberry [1962], Mzeka [1980] 81-2). Once acquired the liability is transmitted to all issue, except that the issue of a *mtaar* father by a *nshiyilar* wife is limited to the first-born son and daughter, or their substitutes. Of the methods of recruitment described above, the first two were by far the most important. Dynastic tradition has it that, as in Ntem and Mbiame, the first male retainers were the sons of princesses (in the extended sense, the *Fon* being the marriage-lord of all female *won nto*' down to the grand-daughters of princesses and' great-grand-daughters of princes) and that recruitment was progressively deferred to remoter descendants. Be that as it may, it is conceivable that marriage systems which allow issue to be reclaimed by the bride-giver when rights *in genetricem* are not acquired lie behind the original

institution, later enlarged by gifts and the protection Nso' could afford from raiders. Nso' social categories are applied, in a rough and ready way, to the former tributary chiefdoms, though their social configurations and marriage-systems may differ. Nso' patricians are categorized in terms of the status of their heads, though one or more component patrilineages--the exogamous localized units--may belong to different social categories. The headquarters of a clan or sub-clan is normally marked by a *nggay*, a ceremonial assembly hall.

In some contexts Nso' commoners view their society as divided into *wir fon*, people of the *Fon* (members of the royal clan as a whole, and retainers) and themselves, *wir mtaar*, often self-described as *wir Nso'* nsay, people of the Nso' earth. It is the former who are seen as the members of *nggiri* and *ngwerong*, though, as we shall see, a few wealthy commoners were admitted to the upper lodges of *ngwerong* (*yeengwerong* and *ngwerong vitse'*) in special circumstances, though never to *yeenggiri*, the upper lodge of the royals' society.

Cutting across social categories were the variously named military and hunting clubs, collectively *manjong*. These, apart from restrictions on the social category of the sector commanders, *amfoome*, who were retainers of the *Fon* and chief councillor, and prescriptions in certain clubs as to the lineages from which particular officers were drawn, were open to all adult males. Consequently, during the colonial period, they became an important means whereby public tasks were allocated. They were grouped into two sectors, *Gham* and *Ba'l* roughly corresponding, respectively, to the old *Kovvifem*-centred kingdom, and to the southern and western acquisitions of the later *Kumbo*-centred kingdom: *Kumbo* itself was so divided. The most prestigious lodges, privileged to have human and animal supporters of their pedestal drums, elaborately carved doorframes and support posts, were those of *mfu'* (bullroarer), with headquarters adjacent to the palace: *mfu'* was acquired from the *Bamum* borderlands, and came under royal patronage.

The honorific of *faay* (pl. *afaay*), literally 'great house', was most often hereditary and applied to lineage heads, in any category, and to hereditary palace stewards (*ataanto'*) who might be at the head of large retainer lineages. The title *sheey* might be held by princes on the way to establishing a large lineage warranting the appellation of *faay*, and by elders assisting a greater lord, in the same position. It was and is conferred, also, by virtue of office in *ngwerong* or *nggiri*, or upon untitled persons admitted to *yeengwerong*. Latterly (from the 'fifties onward) both have become a royal award for personal achievement without any guarantee of heritability. Men of title, heirs of substantial lineage or sub-lineage settlements, are referred to as *ataala'*.

The *Fon* was supported by councillors, *vibay* (sing. *kibay*), of whom there were traditionally seven hereditary titles of the first order: argument surrounds the composition of the original seven, supposedly in office at the old capital where the foundations of the compounds ascribed to five of them could pointed out in 1958 (Kaberry, Lantum and Bamboye, 1961). seems likely enough that the title system was reconstituted the move of the palace to Kumbo (properly Kimbo'). In 1947 Kaberry listed 13, five of whom were created after 1930. The most important of these, Ndzeendzev, assists the *taawong* and *yeewong* in installing the *Fon* (see below) and should be his closest adviser with more privileged access than any. He is supposedly the descendant of an immigrant royal around whose rise to power many variant legends cluster.² His ancestor is seen by most as the *Fon*'s fosterfather, by some as his titular *taayee fon*

(*Fon*'s mother's father), by northern neighbours as the husband of a Nso' princess. Tradition asserts that he superseded Taangkum, now second in rank; and that, in the distant past, Taangkum 'had more people than the *Fon*' and performed the annual sacrifice 'on the road to Kimi' (Bankim), the traditional source of the dynasty. Like the *Fon*, the most important *vibay* had, in the past, sacrosanct wives who went naked; their own retainers were recruited from daughter-lines and refugees and immigrants attracted by their prestige.

In his duties as high priest of the cult of the royal ancestors and the earth the *Fon* was assisted by a prince-priest, *taawong*, and a princess-priest, *yeewong*, close royal agnates with commoner mothers, selected as each reign began. From descendants of prince-priests, *ataawong*, become *duy* were recruited the *vi bay ve kpu*, traditionally seven, the priests of the royal burial, charged with reconciliatory functions and mortuary embassies. They were assisted in the burial and maintenance of the royal grave-huts by four commoner lineage heads, descendants of commoner lords married to *duy* women, referred to as *won jemer fon*, sister's sons of the *Fon*. These also paved the graves of the great *vibay* of *duy* status in the capital. They had other duties, befitting representatives of daughter-lines, who are credited, by Nso', with the power of protecting the heads of wife-giving lineages from the malice (*ro*) or *maleficium* (*virim*) of their rival agnates. Their meeting-place, *taamban*, was on the edge of the *ngwerong* enclosure, from which they were barred.

As we shall see, the *Fon*'s own mother (*yeefon*), and the princess surrogates of earlier *ayeefon* and their positional successors, called *afenggay*, were accorded special honours.

Privileged access to the *Fon*, the inner palace, the palace associations and cults, the right to speak to the *Fon* and wear a cap in his presence in the outer

palace, all had to be paid (*tang*) for: to *tang* is to make prescribed offerings in return for entitlements, to those senior to one. Emergence from the junior ranks to *ngwerong*, elevation to a title, entry to *yeengwerong* or *yeenggiri*, or progression through the various stages of the night *ngwerong*, involved offerings. Even the *Fon*, on his accession, had to *tang* his pages, his senior inherited wives, and the palace associations, including *mfi*'. While offerings to palace associations reflected a man's advances in public esteem, visibly marked by his accoutrements and passage through particular entries to reserved areas during his life, they also called forth, at his death and burial, celebrations which distinguished him from others.

This description, except where we have stated otherwise, refers to the situation as it was in the first three decades of this century, as recounted by the informants of W.M. Bridges (MS 1934), M.D.W. Jeffreys (MSS 1937-1942, 1958/9), P.M. Kaberry (MSS and 1952, 1957, 1959, 1962, 1969), E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry (1960, 1968), and Paul N. Mzeka (1980), whose important study has been augmented by recent enquiries by Chem-Langhee and Fanso.

Historical Background

The present palace in Kumbo dates in the main from 1960 onwards. The former palace was destroyed by fire in December 1959, save for the two *mfi*' houses, the *nggiri* enclosure and the grave-huts of the then five previous Kumbo rulers. It stands on a shelf between headwaters of the River Buy; the precinct was never moated.

Oral tradition has it that Kumbo was the last of three capitals of Nso', the earlier ones being at Kovvifem (forest of old settlements) to the north-east, and at Taavisa, to the north. Kovvifem remains a major centre for seasonal sacrifices at which the *Fon* officiates. Taavisa (up at iron slag) is a minor one, usually represented as a place of refuge of one or two *afon*; Jeffreys here discovered abundant traces of slag and tuyeres.

The tendency to refer titles and offices back to Kovvifem makes the reconstruction of Nso' history hazardous. However, the information given by Koelle's Nso' informant (Koelle [1857], 21) lends support to traditions that Kumbo had been colonized and the Ngkar driven out of their old moated capital at Shisong, by Nso' in alliance with Mbiame, before a raid by mounted archers drove out the then ruler, Sembum I or Fomukong. He took refuge with the Papia' in Bamum, in the Nun marshes, and on the Nso'-Oku border before returning to Kumbo. From here the incorporation of Ngkar was completed. The first palace is said to have been a little above the present

site. The expansion of Nso' continued under a later ruler, Tamanjo, who is credited with dividing Nso' into two *manjong* sectors. Expansion continued in Sembum II's reign (188?-1907); Din was taken, the southern military clubs repulsed a Bamum invasion (C.1885-8), areas to the north were brought under control, and a serious Banyo Fulani raid repelled c.1899/1900.

The general outline of the old palace (fig.3), with the exception of *la' nggiri*, dates from the period between early 1902, when von Pavel's forces and then Hans Ramsay's party traversed Nso' without incident, and 1905, when German patrols made a show of force in western Nso'. After Ramsay's passage, according to eyewitnesses, the palace was ransacked and set in flames by a German detachment en route to Banyo. Their testimony suggests that the palace had been rebuilt long before the long-planned German punitive expedition of April-June 1906, under Glauning. The war left the palace intact, though picked clean of valuables.

Between 1913 and late 1915 the palace was frequently visited by Fr. Johannes Emonts, S.C.J., from Shisong where he had been placed in charge of a school, largely attended by royals and pages. He has left us generalised accounts of the palace and the etiquette which prevailed in the early years of Bi'fon I (1910-47) in a work as useful for its illustrations as its text (see especially [1927]/2, 95-6, 147-50). They suggest that alterations had occurred before parts of the palace were visited in 1937 by a British administrative officer, F.R. Kay, who left some account of it. Some changes are attributable to the British administration who built a Native Court (1927) and Treasury (1932) in areas hitherto occupied by the residences of the palace stewards, and provided an access road which seems to have reduced the women's quarters, which, in 1913, were estimated to accommodate some 300 souls. Emonts' account gives the impression of an almost wholly enclosed forecourt, leading up a slope to the former market through an area of retainers' houses, and of the *Fon's* private quarters being at the rear of the palace (as Kay confirms), then reached by a maze of courts, reduced by 1937.

Sem or Sembum III (1947-72) built new private quarters but resisted pressure to modernize the thatched and mud-walled palace in emulation of Bafut, Bali-Nyonga, and Mankon. Nearer his heart was the restoration of the Kovvifem site. This appears to have been in partial occupation in the time of Sembum II, his father, but by 1912, when the botanist Ledermann visited it, it was in ruins. It was cleared of bush in 1949. It was visited by Kaberry in 1958 who reports the presence of a forecourt (*maandze nggay*), leading to an audience court (*taakibu'*) with stone seats, and surrounding foundations identified as women's quarters (*nsan*), and club houses. A royal grave

enclosure contained twelve graves and 19 headstones. A *lav wong* (house of the country) had been constructed or reconstructed, for sacrificial use.

By 1960 the construction of a new palace at Kumbo, on approximately the same site as the old, almost entirely of modern materials, was well under way with the help of public subscriptions and communal working bees. A walk over the old site by one of us in 1960 revealed, in the inner areas, pebbled floors and incised flagstones of the kind reported by Ankermann, from 1909, as characteristic of Nso'. The new palace is still undergoing modifications. Nevertheless a comparison of Figures 1 and 3, both diagrammatic sketches, will show that the new contains most of the functional features of the old, and that its principal orientations are unchanged. We divide it for purposes of description into four main areas: the outer section, the women's quarters, the 'village' of *ngwerong*, and the central area, the *mbiv faay* (side of the great house) or *nto* proper. An account of activities in and privileged access to sections of the old palace follows the description of the new.

The Outer Section of the Present Palace

The outer section, mainly surrounding the northern end of the forecourt, consists of the mosque, the *lav mfu' Gham* and *lav mfu' Ba'*, the *fem* or royal burial enclosure, and *la' nggiri*, the 'village' of the royals' society. The construction of the mosque began in 1963 and ended several years later. It was a response to Sem III's short-lived conversion to Islam (he died a Roman Catholic). It occupies the site of a row of booths which provided shelter for those who could not go beyond the forecourt into the *nto* proper, and is not regarded as part of the palace.

The *lav mfu' Gham* and the *lav mfu' Ba'* which escaped the 1959 fire, once the effective headquarters of *manjong*, the military and hunting organization of the past, are now little more than social gatherings of adult males through which the *Fon* disseminates important information or has some communal work done. Their former carved support posts~ depicting German officers, suggest that their present location has not changed since the German period at least.

Fem - the term refers both to the graveyard of *afon* and a hut over the *Fon's* grave—contained six huts in 1982: only three persons, the *Fon*, *Faay Taawong*, the prince-priest, and *Yaa Yeewong*, the princess-priest, may enter the huts, unless they are in need of repair; *won jemer fon*, literally sisters' sons of the *Fon*, and male *duy* may enter the graveyard, from which princes and retainers are barred.

La' nggiri, 4 in Fig. 1, though not destroyed by fire, was later enlarged by the addition of mask-lodges, stores for disguises and a new hall, and further modified in the mid-sixties. Before then it consisted of four traditionally-built houses--the *nggay* or assembly and ritual hall, *lav wanmabu'* and *lav shigwaala'*, both mask lodges, and *lav asheey*, the residence of its guardians--joined together by connecting walls round a courtyard containing a large carved mixing bowl. At present it consists of the *nggay*, a costume store (*mban kikum*), six mask lodges (see 4 C-H of Fig.1), and a house for its own retainers. These rooms are contained in three concrete structures round an open courtyard. While the transformation and modernization of the buildings was designed to challenge *ngwerong*, the additional houses and rooms have been provided for recent innovations in the form of dancing masks. We deal at greater length with the development of *nggiri* later.

The Women's Quarters: *Nsan* or *La' Vikiy Nto'* After 19s0

The *nsan* (passage still consists of residences of the palace women, *vikiy nto'*, the *lav maama'*, the *say* ayee fon--memorial graves of *Fons'* mothers--the *kidze* or hunting-spear shrine, and the *nggay*, or ceremonial hall.

The women's residences, formerly separate huts facing inwards in uneven rows, now consist of several mudbrick and pan buildings (see 5 of Fig.1) partitioned into many single rooms. Each room houses from one to three women. Although the *vikiy nto'* are divided into several 'houses' (*lav si*) they are now under the leadership of one *wiiy nto'*, whose title is *Yaa maama'*, or *Yaa ngko'nin*: she is the connecting link between the *vikiy nto'* and the *Fon*, and between them and the outside world. Because of her importance her house (6 in Fig.1) is the official resting place for any *yaa* (titled female royal or positional successor of a *yee fon*) who comes to the palace, is separated from those of other women, and is located near the important *kidze*, at 8, and the *say ayee fon*, at 7. *Say se ayee fon* is reputed to contain one 'real' grave of an unknown *yee fon*. When a *yee fon* dies she is buried in her natal compound--no death or mortal illness, save the *Fon's*, was tolerated in the palace. Soil is taken from her grave by *won jemer fon* and buried in the *say se ayee fon* in token burial. stones are then lined round the token grave, which is henceforward honoured as her real grave.³

The *nggay*, at 9, one of the three traditionally built houses in the palace, is a large building which serves as common hall and family ritual centre. It is here that the deaths of the *Fon*, *won nto'* and *vikiy nto'* are mourned and where Yeewong utters the first wail that formally opens the *Fon's* mourning ceremonies. Its door must not be closed. Before the 1959 fire the *Fon's* own

drinking club, *nggwa' kibu'*, the club of the gate-house, had its own separate building to the left of the main gateway to the palace (Fig. 3, 9). Since then it has been in the *nggay*.

The *kidze* retains its old form. It is an open circular enclosure surrounded by posts hung with raffia fronds (*rang* or *kirang*), set at intervals. Members of the *kidze* palace cult sacrificed here at the beginning of the hunting season and, in the past, before Nso' embarked on a military expedition.

Nowadays sacrifices are made here when Nso' teams are involved in a national competition.

Apart from the *kidze* site, marked off by the *kirang* emblem of reservation, visitors can go anywhere in the *nsan*: it is not a guarded harem. In the past members of a *wiy* nto's family visiting the capital could be entertained by her. The nakedness which set the *Fon*'s wives and those of the great *vibay* apart from other women as sacrosanct was abolished by the Nso' Local Council in November, 1961.

***La'ngwerong* after 1960**

La' ngwerong (the village of *ngwerong*), 10 in Fig. 1, is still divided into two distinct parts, *taamban* and *ngwerong* proper.

Taamban, in the upper section, contains the house of the classificatory sisters' sons of the *Fon*, the *lav won jemer*. Members of *ngwerong* may enter *taamban* and the *lav won jemer* but the *Fon*'s *won jemer*, as *mtaar*, are prohibited from the inner section of *ngwerong la'*. Yet they are still so feared and respected that if any of them is present he wields authority over the area and must be served first with any wine or food brought into *ngwerong la'*. We shall refer to their ancient functions later. Up to the end of Bi'fon I's reign *taamban* also served as a playground for young pages.

Going south from *taamban* the first house leading to the inner section is *koko'*, at 10 B, a huge house with three doors, acting as a passage-way between *taamban* and the rest of *la' ngwerong*.

It is also a temporary store for any goods being taken to the palace. Its three doors are always open. Next to it, off a courtyard, is the *nggay ye teri*, the hall of the lesser *ngwerong*, commonly referred to simply as *nggay*. It is the common hall and ritual centre for all *ngwerong* members and it is here that the *ataanto'*, palace stewards, and the *asbeey ve ta*, the retired *asbeey*, former guardians of *ngwerong*, sit to take important executive decisions concerning the association or Nso' as a whole. It is also the seat of the mask-lodge *jwi ngwerong*, lit. dog of *ngwerong*, and the residence of the *sheey woo lav ye kU'un*,

guardian of the larger house of the lesser *ngwerong*, always a uterine descendant of the *Fon*, formerly recruited from the Ba' side of Nso'.

On the left of the west of the main courtyard, L, there are two houses, one of which is partitioned into two unequal-sized rooms. The smaller, D, is the house of the *sheey* of the smaller house, recruited from the Gham side. (The membership of *ngwerong* itself, however is not divided into sectors.) This is a new item: before the 1959 fire the *sheey* of the smaller house lived in *lav kibarangko*', now at E in the larger of these two rooms. This important mask-lodge, with a 'strong' masker restrained by ropes, is analogous to *ngko*' elsewhere. The other house, at F, is *shun kitav*, literally the mouth of the store, where retired retainers, who had spent several years of their youth in *ngwerong la*' as pages, meet as a society. Now that the practice of recruiting boys into *ngwerong* has discontinued, this society recruits gifted musicians into its membership.

There are three houses on the east side of the main courtyard.

The nearest to the *nggay* is the *lav kinggaayasi*, a mask-lodge embodying stilt-dancers wearing bush-cow helmet-masks. Immediately to the south of it, at H, is the *nggo*', literally grindstone. Although *ngwerong* occasionally 'stands' or 'talks' in the *nggay*, i.e. its bell music is played there, the prescribed house for the production of such music when it rains is the *nggo*'. Before the 1959 fire the floor of the *nggo*', on which *ngwerong* 'stood', was raised more than twenty feet above the ground. This, it was said, was because *ngwerong* used it to summon either the retainers or members of the *manjong* military organization to the capital in times of emergency. The last, and biggest, house in *ngwerong la*' often referred to as *nggay ye wiy* or *nggay ye ku'un*—the great assembly and ritual hall—is the *nggay yeengwerong*, or hall of the mother of *ngwerong*, at Ii its members, the *nggang se ngwerong*, meet here weekly, and the affairs of the society, the greater *ngwerong*, are dealt with here.

We turn now to the four courtyards and some gates and entrances.

The courtyards at J and K are without special importance, but the large courtyard at L, maandze *ngwerong*, has several functions.

It is, of course, a main concourse for gossip and news. *Ngwerong* 'stands' here in good weather. It is here that the decisions of *ngwerong* are handed down to retainers by the *ataanto*' and retired *asheey ngwerong*, and it is here that once a week on Ntangrin, the seventh day of the Nso' eight day week, retainers gather to drink palm-wine provided by some of them and to receive *ngwerong*'s instructions. The courtyard at M is where the *nggang se ngwerong* store their special bags or get dressed to accompany the processions of *yeengwerong*.

The *Fon* alone can go anywhere he likes in *ngwerong la'*: the door on the western wall of *nggay yeengwerong* is the *Fon's* own entrance. Apart from the *Fon*, entry into *nggay yeengwerong* is limited to *nggang se ngwerong*, those who have acquired membership in this society, and its own guardian, *sheey woo nggang*. The mask lodges of *kibarangko'* and *jwi ngwerong* are closed to all except their own initiates during their sessions. Otherwise the courtyards and houses are free to entitled persons. But it should be stressed that only male retainers, a few *vibay*, and a very few others initiated in special circumstances we shall deal with later, can come to *ngwerong la'*. Generally speaking it is a strictly male enclave from which royals and commoners are excluded.

The Central Area: *mbiv faay* or *nto'* after 1960

The *mbiv faay*, or side of the great house, can be said to start with the *maandze nggay*, at 11, a very large forecourt with little vegetational cover. Before 1960 it contained an old kola tree, under which litigants sat, awaiting summons; and a bed of *kikeng* (*Dracaena* sp.) allegedly planted to establish the palace. Here the original owner of the land, a commoner lord, sacrifices annually, reputedly in the dark hours before dawn. Around it were stones where, in the past, two hornblowers, whose duty it was to awaken the *Fon*, sat to receive their reward. Tradition has it that in the remote past the *maandze nggay* contained the stone anvils of the smiths, of *duy* lineage, who made way for the palace. It is here that dances and presentations for the palace take place, as when a lineage-head who has worked up a *kikum* (costumed society) comes to present it to the *Fon* and get it established by royal licence (*mbu'me*). It is here too that the *kimbunfon*—the salutation of the *Fon* with gifts on succession to title—of *duy* or *mtaar* lineage or sub-lineage heads takes place. (Those of princes took place in *taakibu'*, and of retainers in the *shuufaay ntari*, see below.) The *Fon* is presented to the people here. Under normal circumstances no commoner goes beyond this point.

The audience court or *taakibu'*, at 12, is next approached. It is now a grassless courtyard enclosed on the north and south by two long houses, and by two walls with wide verandas on the east and west. The house on the north, the *kibu'* itself, a storied building, has one major entrance through it to *taakibu'*. At the eastern end of the *kibu'* there is a door (3 of Fig. 2) which connects it to *ngwerong la'*. Except for the page accompanying him this door is reserved to the *Fon* alone. However, during the *yeengwerong* procession, the *nggang se ngwerong* accompanying its day mask can pass through it. (Recently, a separate door for the *yeengwerong* day mask procession has been created near this door, thereby reserving it once more for the *Fon* alone). Once the *Fon* is

out of the palace this door is open, and once he is back it is closed. From *ngwerong la'* one can also enter *taakibu'* through a door on the east side, 5, and from the *nsan* through a passage, 13, at the back of the wall of the *kibu'*.

Commoners apart, any man, provided he takes off his slippers, can enter *taakibu'*: in former times, important foreigners excepted, he would have had to *bun fon*, or *tang nto'* as a former page in *ngwerong* or *nggiri*, unless he was an attendant on the *Fon*, or came in the retinue of a man of title. It is in *taakibu'* that the *Fon* and his councillors, the *vibay* and *ataanto'*, listen to complaints and judge civil cases and misdemeanours, during which time a commoner can enter *taakibu'* as a litigant or witness but must depart as soon as his business is over. *Taakibu'* is the furthest point in the palace that *awir duy*, a male cadet royal, can attain, unless he is a *kibay*. No one but a *nggang ngwerong* who has completed prescribed initiatory rituals can come up to this point in the *mbiv faay* wearing a baldric and scabbard and carrying a staff, and he can only do so during a *yeengwerong* procession. The striped staff he bears, *mbang ngwerong*, is peculiar to *ngwerong*.

The sitting positions and access routes to the *taakibu'* are shown diagrammatically at Fig. 2: the sitting positions are lettered. A comparison with Fig. 3 shows no change, except in the position of women title-holders.

The Inner Courtyards

There are three main courtyards behind *taakibu'*, shown at 13, 14, and 15, in Fig. 1.

Shuufaay ntari, or court of entertainment, is where the *Fon* distributes meat to those permitted to come thus far, that is the seven *vi bay*, the senior *ataanto'*, princes, princesses, and personal pages and their male descendants. It is a more formal area than *shuufaay kiresi*, where the *Fon* nowadays relaxes and converses with his foreign guests: the latter is open to the same persons except the ordinary retainers. On Kiloovey, the 2nd day of the Nso' eight day week, when *yeengwerong* meets, and on Nggoylum, the fifth day, the commemorative burial day of Nso' *afon*, the *Fon* may not receive foreigners, any members of the public, or leave the palace. Apart from any appearance at the *nggay yeengwerong* he spends these two days secluded in the *kiresi* dealing with the problems presented to him by the *vikiy nto'*. Entry to this area, 14 in Fig. 1, is restricted to the *vikiy nto'*, very young royal children, the *Fon's* personal pages, and those who have *tang faay kishiiy*, paid for the bedchamber, whom we deal with below.

Residential Buildings

The most important residence is the *faay kishiyy*, the *Fon*'s bedchamber, at 17. Males who may *tang faay kishiyy* and enter it on summons are the seven *vibay* holding old and permanent titles, *ataanto'*, and former personal *pages*—*nshiy se lav se faay*—who have completed their service with appropriate ceremonial. These must have feasted their predecessors and taken oaths of faithfulness to the *Fon*. When the *Fon* is at the point of death the only males who may enter the bedchamber (according to Kaberry [FN] and Mzeka, *Ope cit.* 31) are Ndzeendzev and the *kibay* Ndzeendzevtsen, reputedly of a senior collateral royal line, any *ataanto'* who have *tang faay kishiyy*, and the prince-priests, *ataawong*. otherwise it could, of course, be entered by *vikiy nto'*, save for those of *lav Ndzeen*,⁴ now extinct, young children of the palace, and youthful pages.

In 1982 there were three *afaay kishiyy* (16-18) the one in use by *Fon Bi'fon* II, one formerly used by the late *Fon* Sem III, and one, under construction, on or near the site of that used by *Bi'fon* I. The only other living space in this area, now, is the *faay nsheelav*, from whence the *Fon*'s personal pages can easily be summoned. Access to it is strictly limited to those who have access to *shuufaay kiresi*.

Other Buildings

There are some other functional buildings in *mbiv faay*. At 20 in Fig.1 is *faay ndzey*. *Ndzey* is both a complaint (with all the features of rheumatoid arthritis) and its cure, which is *shiv se afon*, a royal medicine. It is contracted by touching the *Fon* or telling a lie while in contact with it. Persons visiting the palace are now at liberty to drink it as a proof of 'clear conscience. It is now prepared by a northern lord; formerly it was prepared by a sub-chief, *Fon Nse'*, and kept by the senior *ataanto'*.

The *Fon*'s kitchen, simply referred to as *faay*, at 21 is where his meals are prepared by young *vikiy nto'*. In the past (compare Fig. 3) the young *vikiy nto'* lived in this *faay*, alluded to as the *ngwerong* of the palace women, until they became pregnant, when they left it to bear their child in their home compound, from whence they returned to the *nsan* after childbirth. Only young wives and pages are admitted to it.

Faay shishmaa, the house of hunger, the house of the cult of the earth and the promotion of good harvests, at 22, has been, like the *nggay* in the *nsan*, constructed in traditional style. The present members of the cult in addition to the *Fon* and *ataawong*, are the seven *vibay* or *vibay vee saamba*, the seven

senior *ataanto'* or *ataanto' vee saamba*, *taanto'* Faay Kuykishwang as palace thatcher (*nggaa kimsuy*), *kibay* Shuufaay woo Lange (a descendant of a former *nshiyilav faay*) as representative of Ngga' Bi'fon III, Sheey Fonba' (a *nshiyilav faay*) as representative of Sembum III, Sheey Lavnggwa' (a *nshiyilav faay*) as representative of Ngga' Bi'fon II, and Sheey Henry Kingkinin as messenger (*nggaa ntum*) of Shuufaay Ndzeendzev. The membership of the last three will lapse on their death. It was here, according to Kaberry, that plants were cut and mixed to make apotropaic medicines.

Faay kibve (house of ashes) at 23, is the royal mortuary to which the *Fon's* body is carried from the *faay kishiiy* to be washed and prepared for burial by the *ayeewong*, in the presence of the seven *vi bay* and *taanwong*. The houses at 24 and 25, *faay ataanto'* and *faay vibay*, as their names imply, are resting and chatting rooms for them, and when not in use are open to other users of *shuufaay ntari*. Since the *Fon* does his writing in the *shuufaay kiresi*, the *Fon's* office, at 26, is essentially his private audience hall: anybody who is allowed into *taakibu'* is allowed into the *Fon's* office.

Next to this category of buildings in the *mbiv faay* are those which serve mainly as stores. The *kitav ke wong* at 28, is the store for the 'things of the country'--the double bell, bag, calabash, pourer and other instruments and containers used in the sacrifices by the *Fon*, *taanwong* and *yeewong*: it is reserved to them alone. The *kitav ke bom* (29) is the *Fon's* palm wine store--*bom* is the etiquette word for the *Fon's* wine--and is restricted to specially chosen *vikiy nto'*, to the *ataanto'* Faanjang and Tsenkay, who are the 'hurriers' of the palace wine supply, and the *Fon's* personal pages. No one may unstop a calabash of *bom* save the *Fon* himself, the hurriers or a *wiiy nto'*. The *kitav ke kor*, at 30, is a store for the equipment of a dance society of the palace women; the instruments of the *kigha'*, a royal dance of warlike associations, are also stored there, while those of *cong*, another women's society, which formerly had a store of its own, are now stored in a *wiiy nto's* house. Entry into *kitav ke kor* is restricted to the *vikiy nto'*, and those royals and retainers who are members of the association. The *kitav ke mengka'* is the *Fon's* firewood store, associated with the kitchen, and officially only used by those who have access to the kitchen: in fact any *wiiy nto'* who can snatch firewood from it. The garages, which house the *Fon's* two vehicles, are open to anyone who can come as far in as *taakibu'*.

Finally there are the *faay nshwi* and *ngka'*, at 32 and 33.

Formerly sub-chiefdoms gave annual tribute (*nshwi*) in the form of farm produce and stock, and the *Fon* also received gifts of the same items from his Nso' subjects; these were stored in the *faay nshwi* or tethered in the *ngka'*. The

link with the past has been retained in the naming of these stores, one of which, the *ngka'*, has been built to retain its traditional appearance.

Nto' Nso' In the Reigns of Bi'fon I and Sim III

By 1958, most of the old servicing infrastructure of the palace had disappeared, for the same reasons as those Nkwi has described for Laikom (Nkwi [1974] 191-3). The *Fon* had one resident personal page (at present eight, two of whom are 'royal ineligibles') and depended to an increasing extent on his own extended family, wives, and a few part-time employees, for personal services. There were no longer any boys, other than the *asbeey*, resident in *ngwerong la'*, a situation which obtains today. The few recruited had run away to school. Some schoolboys and youths of *nshiylav* status had been admitted to the mask-lodges of the lesser *ngwerong* and could 'follow the masks' on ceremonial occasions. The adult sections of *ngwerong* remained active as drinking clubs. Retainers continued to bring in their annual render of firewood. There were still two resident *asbeey*, appointed in 1956, and an ageing *sheey woo nggang* remained in charge of *yeengwerong* properties. The *asbeey* who were resident, the *ataanto'*, the *asbeey vee taa* - the elder *asbeey* of *ngwerong* who are no longer resident—and a few lords of retainer status, who were *nggang se ngwerong*, maintained the institution. In 1958, only two *non-nshiylav* lords had completed the heavy payments needed to acquire the fullest mortuary privileges available to them in *yeengwerong* and two others had made the preliminary payments.

On the other hand, *nggiri* remained active as a prestige and display society. The royal harem remained intact though seldom replenished, with roughly 80 wives in the palace. (Mzeka records 89 in 1977; in 1945 there were approximately 100.) with a few at *Fon Sem's* Ndzerem estate (which he had built up as a prince), there was a large enough complement, given other help, to cope with hospitality and the *Fon's* twenty-two acres of mensal land, and its produce: two labour-saving corn mills had been installed in the palace. A long dispute between the *Fon's* supporters and Ndzeendzev, complicated by an old quarrel between the latter and Taangkum, had deprived the *Fon* of his leading adviser. No one remained, except the *taanto'* Faay Faanjang and the *ataawong*, of the male group permitted to enter his bedchamber, though one, Ndzeendzevtsen, had started payments. Other institutions centred on the palace—the royal cults and the women's societies, *cong* and *kor*—survived. The *manjong* organization, under able leadership, adapted itself still further but its supersession by political party organization seemed a matter of time.

The involvement of the *Fon* himself in modern politics is treated elsewhere (Nkwi, 1979; Chem-Langhee, MS 1979).

The *nsan* or *la' vikiy nto'* in the old palace

The *nsan* accommodated adult wives and pre-nubile trainee wives, *vikiy nto' vee nsheelav*, recruited from the retainer category by senior wives, presented by retainer compound heads or by *mtaar* lords (through *ataanto'* as a rule). A few had been presented by tributary chiefs—there were more, regularly replenished, in the past—or given by neighbouring rulers in diplomatic exchanges. Before the Pax Germanica the *Fon* was presented with female captives taken in raids, who became his marriage wards, usually given out as rewards to warriors or as *aliy won* (sing. *liy wan*), nursemaids, to princes or princesses who then became their marriage lords, with control over the disposition of their female issue. Kaberry reported that, in the mid-forties, a majority of the royal wives were of commoner status, whose issue alone were eligible for the Fonship (Kaberry, apud McCulloch et al., 1952, 36).

The royal wives were then headed by two senior wives entitled *Yaangko'nin* and *Yeela'* (mother of the compound), chosen by the *Fon*. These had, at the time of Kaberry's sojourns, maintained their positions from previous reigns. The *Yeela'*, Fewo (d.1963) had been Sembum II's favourite wife, and was inherited by Bi'fon I. *Yaangko'nin* had been Bi'fon's choice. They headed the *kfem se vikiy nto'*, seven leading wives, as well as the *ayeesum* (mothers of the farm) at the head of working groups.⁵

The *kfem se vikiy nto'* were also royal choices and elderly women. In 1958, all but one, a princess from the small assimilated tributary chiefdom of Ndzeen, were *mtaar*. Mzeka (*op. cit.* 98-8) has it that the *Yaangko'nin* and *Yeela'* must be 'pure Nso' and Kaberry that they must be either *mtaar* or from a *duy* lineage so remotely connected that intermarriage was possible. Both had to be members of *Lav Nso'* (see below); in 1958 both were *mtaar*. The *kfem si* had the duty of being with the *Fon* (*resi Fon*), managing the *Fon's* sleeping roster, keeping the sacrificial places swept and preparing sacrificial meals, and acting as transmitters of orders to the *ayeesum* of the palace from the *Fon* and to his pages, in particular if these had not yet acquired the right to answer the *Fon*. It was they who cared for the disguises of the *Fon's* own *ngwerong* messenger detachment, and supervised the *vikiy nto'* of trainee status appointed to fetch water, grind corn, and cook for the *Fon*. They were housed, as we have seen, adjacent to the bedchamber, and attended to the *Fon's* personal needs, one of them, for example, keeping the *Fon's* hair and nail parings in a bag, later buried (Jeffreys, MS 1960). Only these elderly

women, of the *Fon's* wives, had the right to attend the *Fon* in illness. As guardians of the connubial roster, they were the first to detect adultery in other wives (once a capital offence), and were courted by the parents of wives who had not yet borne a child. They were in constant touch with those palace stewards who had privileged access to the inner courts. The latter had the duty of sacrificing for the welfare of the royal wives and children, and, in the presence of their senior, Faay Maamo, arranging the marriages of princesses to *mtaar* lords.

In much of what follows we have used Mzeka's account (91-9) to amplify Kaberry's 1947 census of the *nsan*. The wives' houses harboured from three to five women (of whom some were young girls not yet accorded the privilege of a hearth of their own). They were allocated to five working groups, also 'houses' (*lav si*), selected by *Yaangko'nin* and *Yeela'* after consultation with the older women of the group. The *lav si* were Lav Nso', Lav Ngkar, Lav Nsheelav, Lav Nggoran, and Lav Ndzeen. The five *ayeesum* were ceremonially installed in the *nggay*, secluded in it and camwooded like a *faay*, and, like a *faay*, performed both *kitayiyi* (salutation of the mother's lineage head on succeeding to a faayship) and *kimbunfon* (salutation of the *Fon* on succession, with gifts of firewood, palm wine, chickens, a castrated he-goat, and money). The *ayeesum* kept their office for life. They also had a role in the marriage of princesses born in their *lav*, reporting their readiness for marriage to the *ataanto'*, and arranging for the escorting of the bride to her husband (Fonka & Banboye [1960] 12, 27). They also organized food supplies for the *kimbunfon* of princes and princesses' sons born to members of the *lav*. The *lav* link is a close one; in family histories recorded by Kaberry, 'children of the *lav*' retained this link over generations, referring to each other as *afer* (siblings).

In addition to the palace groups under their *ayeesum* the *Fon's* farmland (*sum fon*) was cultivated by the wives of retainers divided into two groups according to the sectors Gham and Ba', under a Yeesum Gham, recruited from the wine-tappers' village of Mbuluv, and a Yeesum Ba', recruited from the wine-tappers' village of Mba', each assisted by a deputy or *nggwaang*.

The *nsan* provided the headquarters of the Nso' women's society, *cong*, which provided harvest renders to the palace, and had its own *shiv*, forbidden to men, though regarded as a *shiv se afon*, a royal medicine. The palace *cong* was headed by women who were palace or outside *ayeesum* or *kjem se vikiy nto'*, who had automatic entry to the palace women's societies (Kaberry [1952], 98). In 1945 there were two other women's societies centred on the palace. One was *lafolir* (nowhere to hide), restricted to royals and retainers. The other, *kor*, like *cong*, could have male *nsheelav* patrons who could become

taangko' (father of the basket called *ngko'*) or *nggang kor*: it was viewed as superior to *cong*.⁶

Kaberry, expecting to find two 'sides' to the *nsan*, echoing the pervading Gham and Ba' division in military organization, the organization of the *Fon*'s wine-tappers, and in the 'gatefees' formerly payable to Ndzeendzev (Ba') and Taangkum (Gham) on the occasion of *kimbunfon*, searched for it in vain. True, there had formerly been two *ayaa* of the palace, Yaangko'nin and Yaa woo nggun, but the latter had died and was never replaced. In 1958, the *nsan*, if geographically divided between upper (*kny*) and lower (*tse*n or *rong*) was not divided between *Yaangko'nin* and *Yeela'* in any functional respect. The *nggay*, the central dancing yard, and the memorial stones of the *ayeefon* were a common focus.

Young male *won nto'* stayed with their mothers until they could walk about, in the care of older children or page-wives. As young boys, they slept in the dormitory halls to the left of the *taakibu'* under the care of senior pages (see below). It was repeatedly affirmed that in the past princes, on reaching manhood, were driven out of the palace under threat from *ngwerong* and, as case histories show, went to live with their mother's people, with married sisters, took refuge with palace stewards and retainers who had cared for them or with princes who had established themselves at a distance. By 1958, the regime was milder, and princes seemed to have edged nearer the palace. A particular group of young royals, sons of princesses or other 'royal ineligibles', might become palace pages, competitively set against those in the *nshiyilav* category. These young royals, as far as we could ascertain, were never many.

The Audience Court and the Fon's Advisers

Taakibu' (up at the *kibu'* area) was reached from the forecourt through the *kibu'* where visitors left arms, staves and bags: the term refers also to the boys' residence of a great nobleman's compound. The entrance, *shuu kibu'*, see 10 of Fig. 3, was surrounded by carvings and screened by a lattice, and was a place at which sacrifices of reconciliation might be performed, as when, in 1958, a round of reconciliatory sacrifices with Mbiame and Bamum was started. Emonts' account of it suggests that by 1913, at all events, civil disputes were already referred to *taakibu'* from the arbitration of *ataante'* (village headmen). But the convivial aspect of these audiences and the opportunity they gave to those who had *bun fon* and earned the right to clap hands to him, to appear before the *Fon* in their caps and drink his wine, was more in evidence in the 'thirties (Bridges, 1934). Immediately to the right of

the second section of the *kibu* was the 'Fon's door' (at 11 of Fig. 3), through which a newly-installed *Fon*, led by a *yeengwerong* procession, formerly emerged to be presented to the people. Through it he appeared to receive the remonstrances of the *mtaar* lords on occasions when he or his servants had erred or when he summoned them to help resolve a knotty constitutional issue. On such occasions his staff, *kitoom*, was placed before it to signal his emergence.

The order of seating in the *taakibu* was prescribed (see Figs. 2 and 3). The *Fon* sat, as a rule, rather to the right of the raised dais, floored with cobbles inset with roundels representing coiled slow-worms (*nyuywan*), and lined with palm 'bamboos'. In his absence his stool (*kava*)-in 1958 with 'German officer' supports--was brought out to receive hand-claps. The ranking order of the *vi bay* sitting on stones to his far left had occasioned a good deal of bitter argument: the order of the first two, Ndzeendzev and Taangkum, never varied, however.

In fact the *vibay* were referred to variously in different contexts: sometimes as a 'seven' composed of the five traditionally in attendance at Kovvifem (whose orientations in relation to the palace are shown in Fig. 3) with, in addition, two *mtaar vibay* allegedly created at Taavisa; or the 'seven' of *duy* or assimilated *duy* origin who have access to the palace cults, and a share of leopard-meat. There were actually six in 1945-1958, the *taawong*, who is not a *kibay*, sometimes being thrown in to make up the number. All these approximations differed from the precedence actually observed in *taakibu* in 1945. (Nowadays the *duy* set has been made up to seven with one substitution and one addition, while three *vibay* of ancient title, not *duy*, now sit between the invariable first two and the rest of the *duy* 'seven', who are followed by more recent creations including those we may term 'life peers'.) The *vibay* in the past were expected to attend the *Fon* and drink his wine at *taakibu* on three out of the eight days of the Nso' week: prolonged absence betokened contumacy.

A certain vagueness also surrounds the 'seven' *ataanto*: by 1933 eight were recorded by Bridges: the eighth was Bi'fon's creation. The most senior, Maamo, is said to have superseded others and, certainly, his duties were extended by Bi'fon I. The inclusion of the *ataanto* in the judicial aspects of the *taakibu* meetings may well be a development of the colonial period when these meetings were used as the basis of a civil court. Most of the leading palace stewards have compounds close to the palace and four in 1933, and, in 1958, five were members of *yeengwerong*. Other important *ataanto* lived close at hand, among them the smith Fumekuy who had displaced an earlier holder of the office of head of smiths in the capital. Bi'fon II (d.1983) created new

ataanto’ titles, many of whom are now *nggang se ngwerong* (among them Faay woo Lange, whose ancestors’ services were so commemorated).

Sub-chiefs, to use the colonial term, who sat at the foot of the dais to the *Fon*’s left on their own stools were also termed *afon*: these were tributary chiefs of old standing, former renderers of tribute (*nshwi*) which included, as part of the original terms of submission, the presentation of a wife and a page, gifts which might precede an exchange of daughters to seal a dynastic link. Of these the *Fon* of Ngkar held a special position in the past as a defender against Bamum attack. All *afon* had their *keibee* or hostel in the capital, the bulk of them lodging with Ndzeendzev or Taangkum. The *afon* of Oku and Mbiame, traditionally descended from the same ancestor or ancestress as *Fon* Nso’- legends vary both sat on the dais to the *Fon*’s left if they were present. Apart from the chiefs with stools, there were, in Nso’, a sprinkling of refugee chieftlets, effectively not more than compound heads, but treated, for protocol purposes as *vibay* and accorded a stone seat. These were mainly from Bamum or the upper Mape valley.

The women title-holders, the current *yeefon* (the *Fon*’s mother, or her current representative), successors of earlier *ayeefon*, called *afenggay*, and the *ayeewong* (the princess-priests of each reign) were accorded the privilege of seats if they attended, but it was rare for remoter positional successors to do so. The *yeefon* alone had the privilege of a carved stool (*kiko’tin*), a royal bed (Mzeka, p.100), and mortuary festivities similar to the *Fon*’s. At Taakibu’, the *afenggay* previously sat at the side of the *vibay* ahead of Ndzeendzev, and the *ayeewong* sat with the *ataawong* immediately on the *Fon*’s right against a separate wall. None of these royal women were resident in the palace. Those given out in marriage to mtaar nobles, always without substantial marriage gifts, had a two-doored house of their own behind their husbands’ built for them where they received visitors in princely style, seated on the right of the entrance, and were addressed through cupped hands. They could leave their husbands if they wished. The current *yeefon* and *yeewong* might be given the services of *nshiyilav* girls as attendants. The *yeefon*, if a widow and the *Fon*’s own mother, did not re-marry or take lovers, and in the past spent much of her time sitting in *taakibu*’. According to good sources, denied by others, she acted as *interrex* (Lantum *apud* Mzeka, 4).

Ngwerong Past and Present

The modification and revival of the lesser and greater *ngwerong* after 1958 provides one of the most interesting examples of Nso’ cultural resilience. As in the past (Kaberry [1962] 291) they provide for the recognition of men of

merit. We try to reconstruct the institution with the disadvantage that earlier observers were barred from direct observation of its secret and cultic aspects (apart from its orchestra) and depended on informants. So what follows cannot describe its former layout, ritual, and sacra (*shiv*) and deals only with its organization, privileges, and public functions, which included the right to immobilize the palace if the *Fon* was headstrong or neglectful, and to fine him.

The two resident *asheey* 'of the palace' were selected by those who had preceded them in office; they were in charge of the boys recruited to the lesser *ngwerong*. Both were jointly charged with the administration of the lesser *ngwerong*, which performed a wide range of coercive, executive, and messenger duties, elsewhere described (cf. Emonts *Ope cit.* 147-8, Kaberry [1962], Mzeka, 81-2). They held office for a canonical nine years, notched on tallies, and, when they were young adults, were given a symbolic building pole and told to go and build for themselves, endowed in the past with a gun and assisted with gifts for a wife. They were helped to build by their comrades and kept the title of *sheey* for life with a descriptive cognomen. So far as we have been able to ascertain the institution of two *asheey* dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century, presuming that the canonical nine years—and one or two served longer—were observed: there have been fifteen pairs of *asheey*, preceded by a sole *sheey*. Before that their functions were performed by the household officers, *taanshiylav* and *taamfon*, subsequently placed in charge of the pages in the palace proper as the complement of young retainers increased.

Our oldest informant, inducted before the passage of von Pavel's forces, recalled that the two houses each held about 30 boys, in addition to those who slept in the palace. They first slept on a *kiba*', a board of raffia stems, laid on the ground, which was liable to be confiscated as firewood unless it was stowed away. They were later allowed to *tang kiba*', pay for the bed, by feasting those ahead of them and thus allowed to raise their beds from the floor and tie them to the walls. The discipline visited on them - hard beds, sparse food and regular small beatings to toughen them - was strict. After completing their service the youths were graduated in batches according to year of entry, first given their building pole and told to *tang nto*' - offer to the palace - and then to partake of a feast to which their parents contributed. Such young men referred to themselves, with pride in their toughness, as *nsheelav se kiba*'. They were obliged to report each Ntangrin, the seventh day of the Nso' week, at *ngwerong la*', to receive instructions from the palace stewards, and to supply firewood once a year to the palace. At this point they could enter *ngwerong nsaansa*', associated with the lowest grade of masks worn

to accompany the feather-cloaked *shigwaala'* mortuary masker, or allowed to hold the ropes restraining the fearsome *kibarangko'*. When fully adult they could seek membership in one of the mask-lodges cum drinking clubs we have already mentioned either in succession to their fathers or on the proposal of a senior member (Loshaa *apud* Mzeka, 94). Older members would be feasted by the new. In the past, the lodges met weekly, their members providing wine by turns: *kibarangko'* met in the lesser house, the other two in the greater. Of these lodges *jwi ngwerong* prescriptively included the *asheey vee taa* and one or more of the *Fon's* former pages of the bedchamber.⁹

The origins of two of these mask-lodges can be traced. *Kibarangko'* was acquired from Nchan and modified by Lange, a favourite attendant of Bi'fon I. *Jwi ngwerong* was brought in by Faay Fumekuy the smith, probably in the early years of Sembum II, from the Bamum borderlands. At the weekly meetings of *ataanto'* and *asheey vee taa* on Ntangrin in the *lav ye ku'un*, -already referred to, an order of precedence in seating was observed, with Maamo, the senior *taanto'* at the head, followed on such occasions by Mbiinggiy rather than Faanjang, who now comes third but was second to Maamo before the induction of the whole *mtaar* lineage of Mbiinggiy into *ngwerong* as *nsheelav*, then others of the 'seven', followed by other *ataanto'* with those of the wine-tapping areas at the tail. Mbiinggiy's special position in *ngwerong la'* is said to derive from his ancestor's being 'caught' for *ngwerong* when it was first introduced. The meetings of the *yeengwerong*, the greater *ngwerong*, to which we now turn, were on a different day, Kiloovey. The lesser *ngwerong* was a wholly *nshiyilav* organization.

The greater *ngwerong* can, for explanatory purposes, be divided into two overlapping parts, *yeengwerong* and *ngwerong vitsa'*, both served by the *sheey woo nggang*, who is always the child of a *duy* bride 'of the palace salt', and serves for life. *Yeengwerong* refers both to the whole organization and to its day mask, which appears in public at the presentation of the *Fon*, commemorations of the deaths of brother *afon*, at the lamentations of those who have acquired the title of *nggang ngwerong*, when it is making special announcements at the market, and when it is conducting a *taala'*, a man of title, for the first time to *yeengwerong's* hall. It refers also to the meeting on Kiloovey in the greater hall. According to Kaberry's informants this assembly had 'seven' permanent members--the *vibay* Ndzeendzev, Taangkum and Lun, all assimilated *duy*, and three or four *ataanto'*. However, the core of *ngwerong*, as a cult of seers, was *ngwerong vitsa'*, the night *ngwerong*, into which the *Fon* and two chosen companions were initiated immediately after his installation. *ngwerong vitsa'*, apart from these and a select few who had acquired membership by the

lengthy and wealth-consuming process of *tang ngwerong*, was composed of prominent persons of *nshiyilav* status, who, before their introduction to *yeengwerong* were not *ataala*', and were bound to the *Fon* by oath. The night organization was not open to *won nto*' apart from any (always 'royal ineligible') chosen as the *Fon*'s companions: *mtaar* could never be companions.

The cult aspect of *yeengwerong* has become almost totally obscured by its modern adaptations. One of its functions, the discovery and elimination of hostile forces (*virim* and foreign and hostile *sam* or psychic force) could no longer be openly expressed. Unlike similar associations to the west (Nkwi and Warnier [1982] 56-9), *ngwerong* was not itself concerned with the execution of traitors and criminals and made no use of the sasswood ordeal. Purchasable and relatively inexpensive cults, such as *kifan* and *kum*, existed for the removal of the pollution caused by suicide and dropsy, while accidental bloodshedding involved royal priests in the appeasement of the earth.¹⁰ The powerful *nggay* society could be called in to deal with untoward events surrounding death or birth.

In the very early years of German rule the great *nggay* of *yeengwerong* still housed an inquisitory court for judging capital offences, in the main *lese majeste* and witchcraft directed against the *Fon*, in which examination, oathing, and a truth-test by casting garden-eggs (*Solanum* sp.) were used. It continued a surreptitious existence until German intervention etiolated and other influences finally extinguished it. In the 'forties its aura remained strong enough to cause the flight of parties guilty or suspected of treasonable adultery. Its verdicts, in the past, were arrived at in the absence of the *Fon*, who could exercise his prerogative of mercy only after a formulaic apology to *yeengwerong*. In the absence of conclusive evidence, in the past, a *yeengwerong* group made its way to the market, bought a fowl, killed it by dashing its head on the ground, and left it fixed to a pole, dripping its blood on the earth which was invoked to afflict the evil-doer.

Once a verdict was arrived at, the *won jemer fon*, deemed able to detect witchcraft by clairvoyance, were called in, by way of a final test. It was these, assisted by the privileged menials called *vimbaa* (sing. *kimbaa*, horn-blower) who extracted confessions from suspected witches, by tying them up and tightening the ropes, and carried out the executions of those adjudged guilty of treasonable and abominable crimes in a forest area on the old borders of Ngkar. Those indicted were obliged to hang themselves, by throwing themselves off a tree, after an act of homage to the *Fon*. On such occasions, when they were acting under the auspices of *yeengwerong*, the *won jemer fon* wore *ngwerong* disguises and were accompanied by the *vimbaa* blowing their warning

whistles. *Vimbaa* were under the control of Faay Maamo and their drinking club was in his quarters where their bags still hung. Nso' described them as 'like dogs', eaters of scraps, and said they ate the left-overs of the sacrifices made to remove pollution caused by bad deaths. Of those whose careers Chilver and Kaberry were able to trace three were among those regularly supplied in the past by Noonu sub-chiefdoms, the fourth had been embodied for trespassing into *ngwerong la'*. They were seen as exempt from the dangerous effects of their duties, which would have brought affliction (*lon*) to the members of the lesser *ngwerong*.

In the mid 'forties *ngwerong vitse'*, meeting at night, hid in the palace, since Bi'fon I in his declining years was unable to walk: where it normally met in secret at a time of night when nobody but war-scouts and 'bad people' were popularly supposed to be abroad, was not revealed to Kaberry. In 1958 she was only able to trace seven persons, including the senior palace steward *ex officio*, who were members of it.

This simplified account of the great *ngwerong* takes no account of the complexities of admission to it. There were two routes to viewing the *sacra*, one relatively cheap, the other cripplingly expensive. The first was restricted to as yet untitled oath-bound retainers and the *Fon's* initiation companions, essentially those eligible for *ngwerong vitse'*: these were ushered into the meeting hall, on induction, through the *Fon's* door. The stages involved were (i) *nsu si*, washing the face, a small feast (ii) *ko' kitav*, climbing the store, to view the *sacra* (iii) tee *shishbur she ngwerong*, stirring the pepper of *ngwerong*, a more substantial feast which the *Fon* might help to supply (iv) *tang won yeensa'*, paying for the boy and girl dolls carried by jester maskers, relatively cheap (v) *fo ransi kinuu*, for cleaning the feet, a token terminal rite, cheapest of all. By contrast members of the hereditary group and those *ataala'* invited to join them were led from their compounds by a procession, in which the association's day-mask was displayed, first to the *Fon* and then to the *nggay yeengwerong*: the process was preceded by a secret and substantial donation to the *Fon* and the feasting of the escort. Once the token opening feast, *nsu si*, and other preliminary donations were over, candidates in this category proceeded to a far more expensive version of 'stirring the pepper' and 'paying for the dolls' before they embarked on *tang ngwerong*, which entitled them to view the *sacra* and reach the terminal stage. To 'stir the pepper', in the past, involved the gift of a boy and a girl, a bag of cowries and a castrated he-goat to the *Fon* before the Kiloovey set for the feast to the association, which customarily required twelve goats, twelve fowls, fifty calabashes of wine and baskets of foofoo and oil and salt in token quantities. This offering entitled a man, in his lifetime, to the insignia of a *nggang ngwerong*--a distinctive

cap, a bag fastened with a porcupine quill and a cup—and the arrival of the association with its day-mask to stamp down the last layer of earth on his grave. (Nowadays, the donation to the *Fon*, except for the goat, is commuted to a purse of 5-25,000 francs CFA and some cases of beer. Likewise, with the reconstruction of the association's great hall in progress, a man can 'stir the pepper' by making a gift of 100,000 francs CFA towards it, to which the *Fon*'s 'purse' and a token feast, of not more than 5,000 francs CFA, is added. The stage of 'paying for the dolls' can be completed simultaneously.) To *tang ngwerong* was even more formidable. The preliminary stage involved the provision of 30 calabashes of palm-wine (c.450 litres) on three Viloovey running. After that a man was expected to provide, over three consecutive viloovey, 'three forties' of everything deemed appropriately consumable—goats, fowls, calabashes of wine, baskets of foofoo, sticks of firewood—and several fathoms of tie-and-dye royal cloth. On the subsequent Ntangrin the candidate had to feast the lesser *ngwerong*, an occasion marked by a display of jester maskers, *mengkang*, in the market in his honour. Finally, on a subsequent Kiloovey, he was taken to *koko* where he presented the *Fon* with a boy as a page and a girl as *niy nto*'; on that evening, accompanied by *nggang se ngwerong* he went to the residence of Taangkum, the supposed introducer of *ngwerong*, when he again feasted them. A candidate's capacity to pass through these stages was monitored by the senior palace steward, Faay Maamo, the sheey *woo nggang* and a representative of the *Fon*—formerly a retired page of the bedchamber, now a sheey of western education. If this course were attempted nowadays the consumables would have to be enormously increased to match the increased membership, 86 in 1983. Only one commoner-lord who achieved this distinction was alive in 1983 and has since died. In 1958 it was already clear that most men of title were content to rest after 'stirring the pepper' and that the generation of men who had *tang ngwerong* and thus acquired the right to special lamentations was fast dying out. Such men could also acquire the right to a striped prohibition stick, which places their property out of bounds,¹¹ and might be given the right to store *ngwerong* disguises for public purposes.

In the past, *ngwerong la'* included pens for fowls, goats, and dwarf cattle, and stores for firewood and thatching grass. The *Fon*'s dwarf cows did not long survive the provisioning demands of the German military. The cost of importing them is one of the reasons given for the lapse of an annual dry season festival, resembling the Bali *lela*, at which tributary chiefs and their retainues made their appearance, princes performed the *maleri* dance to flutes, and the jawbone encrusted calabashes of *mfu*' were displayed in the forecourt

in the *kigha* dances. It finally died out in the 'thirties, after the lapse of tribute, as in Oku (Koloss [1980] 7).

The Fon's Attendants

The *taakibu* was surrounded, in 1958, by five roomy structures which in the past had provided dormitories for boy pages and domestics, their adult superintendents *taanshiylav* and *taamfon*, and a few other resident adults in charge of dormitories. These houses (see Fig. 3) also provided sleeping accommodation for young princes and the 'royal ineligibles' already mentioned. The young attendants were divided into two groups, the *nsheelav se fon*, domestics not allowed to enter the bedchamber, under Taamfon, who had charge of the inner stores, and the *nsheelav se faay*, the Fon's personal pages, a smaller group, who could enter the bedchamber court. All were attached to surrogate mothers in the *nsan*.

According to the testimony of former personal pages, active during the German regime, the houses marked 13 A and B in Fig. 3, under senior pages, each housed about twenty *nsheelav se fon*: they were used by day as basking and eating houses but at night young princes were driven out, in case they might see or hear something of *ngwerong*. Other houses did double-duty. The rain shelter (13 C) for notables attending *taakibu* accommodated the superintendents and other adult domestics at night. By night *faay tang* (Fig. 3, 17) was used as a dormitory for young princes under the charge of a personal page, born of Bi'fon I's liaison in his prince days with a retainer's wife. *Faay shishmaa* (18) in charge of a senior page, housed both princes and personal pages.

Both groups of young attendants could be drawn from the boys of the lesser *ngwerong* and the young domestics, the *nsheelav se fon*, were usually so recruited. The Fon's personal pages—Bi'fon I had about six—could be picked out for quickwittedness by the *asheey* of *ngwerong*. Some were sons of trusted retainers proffered after a relatively short period of service in the lesser *ngwerong*, while one or two were selected by the Fon himself. Those selected for this service had to *tang*, through their parents, to speak directly in reply to the Fon. As the Fon's constant attendants, present as pipe-carriers and wine-pourers in *taakibu* and the bedchamber court and as confidential messengers, these youths became expert in protocol (for example, memorizing the eponyms of notables) and widely known to visitors. Of those serving Bi'fon I in the decade 1910-20 most became prominent in later life.

La'nggiri

The origins of *nggiri* were a matter of lively dispute in 1958. According to some versions collected by Kaberry it was acquired from the refugee *Fon* Kiluun who had derived it from Tikari and 'gave' it to *Fon* Nso' at Kovvifem. This version is suspect since *Fon* Kiluun joined Nso' during the Kumbo period and because, according to Nso' custom, if he 'gave' it to *Fon* Nso' and still remained under his jurisdiction, he would no longer be allowed to retain it, as he does. *nggiri* members naturally stressed its antiquity and claimed that, far from 'giving it', *Fon* Kiluun, one of many refugees from Bamum, brought his own *nggiri* with him and was obliged to pay the Nso' *nggiri* much wine, many goats and 10,000 cowries for the privilege of keeping it, and that one *kibay*, at least, was descended from a *sheey nggiri* of Kovvifem. The *asheey vee* taa of *ngwerong* described it as 'a thing of yesterday', acquired in the time of Sembum II, echoing the claim of the Fumekuy smith lineage to have introduced *nggiri* masks from Bamum. The fact that the head of this lineage, though of *nshiyilav* status, is a permanent member of *nggiri* and *yeenggiri* is quoted in support of its nineteenth century introduction.

Its present location is relatively recent, it appears. According to elderly informants it was located, long ago, behind the palace, as in Oku, consisted of a single house, and admitted only close royals, some princesses, and a very few *duy*. It is evident that it has been elaborated in recent times, in competition with *ngwerong*. According to Mzeka, *Fon* Mapiri (1907-10) promoted it and even used it executively (*op. cit.* 106-7). Bi'fon I placed it under an interdict after a brawl with *ngwerong* in 1925, which occasioned the intervention of a British officer. This did not prevent a second brawl ten years later which led to the destruction of its compound and reorganization. Sem III is said to have favoured it despite tensions in 1958. There was a further affray in 1976.

The membership of *nggiri* was, in 1958, restricted to male *won nto'* as of right, that is down to great-great grandsons of *afon*, and to recruits of *duy* origin, including *duy kikeng*. This was an expansion of membership since, before 1935, its *duy* membership had been much more strictly limited. The boy attendants in the lesser *nggiri* were exclusively *duy* and recruited from *vi bay* lineages categorized as *duy*. They were superintended by a *sheey nggiri*, a son or son's son of a *Fon*, chosen by the *Fon*: on duty he was garbed in camwooded tunic, face-covering, and feather headdress. He was assisted by *taafu'*, chosen by the elders of *nggiri* from among the *nggiri* pages. Another junior office, that of *sheey kwang*, had lapsed but has been re-introduced

recently. The boys' regime was similar to that of *ngwerong*. They, like the Fon's pages, had to *tang nto'* at the end of their seven to ten years' service. *sheey nggiri* cared for the *yeenggiri* costumes and *taafu'* looked after the *wanmabu'* mask. While he existed *sheey kwang* cared for *kwang*, which later became a *yeenggiri* mask. It would not be true to say that *nggiri* had no administrative functions whatsoever in the past, for its seniors could fine its members for marital breaches and unbecoming behaviour. *nggiri* provided firewood for the palace when called upon but regular contact with the palace, except through *taawong*, was relatively slender: one of the *ataanto'*, Faanjang (who, for this purpose had to *tang nggiri*) acted as messenger. There was another device: in the past a *Fon* might choose a 'royal ineligible' to act as personal attendant from among those residing in the palace, who might become a watchful emissary. Mzeka (112) records that Bi'fon I was wont to take a page with him, who thus 'saw *nggiri*'. *nggiri* was divided into two mask-lodges for mortuary purposes.

Yeenggiri, the senior, was presided over by the oldest *sheey nggiri*. *Mabu'* was the junior *nggiri* with which, in 1958, were associated the masks called *shigwaala'*, apparently recent (which might be escorted by lesser feather-gowned *mabu'* masks) and *wanmabu'*, a 'strong' acrobatic masker. In 1958, *yeenggiri* possessed no masks (other than a gowned and hooded figure) but reputedly had a powerful *shiv* in a pot. A mysterious booming instrument was played at night.¹²

As in *ngwerong* there was a privileged form of entry to *yeenggiri* for some persons, *won nto'*, and *vibay* in the *duy* category, restricted to four before 1935. These only had to 'stir the pepper' to see the *sacra*. This was, nevertheless a formidable enough task involving a good number of goats, fowls, calabashes of wine and baskets of foofoo. Other *duy* seeking admission made an additional preliminary donation of wine. Formerly persons who were not privileged had to *tang* or *bun nggiri*. Kaberry's informants told her that in the more distant past it had involved 'three forties of everything' as for *ngwerong* and a boy and a girl for the *Fon*, or several fathoms of royal cloth in lieu, as the tallies hung in *duy* compounds seemed to attest. Mzeka makes it clear that these requirements have been reduced and that untitled *duy* may now apply to join.

Membership of *yeenggiri*, marked in the past by the use of goblet-shaped caps and decorated bags, also carried with it the privilege of a *kirang* protected store in one's compound and the use of a prohibition stick, much in evidence in 1958 in protection of rights in raffia bush: these privileges also reflected the practice of the great *ngwerong*. However, senior princes who had established a large compound enjoyed these rights automatically, a relic,

perhaps, of an earlier stage in the development of *nggiri*, as elderly *mtaar* informants believed.¹³

Membership of the junior lodge appears to have been less expensive (Mzeka, 244-5). We have no information on its modern internal organization. Mzeka records the acquisition of new masks from the 'sixties on (some with Bamum names), and a great increase in membership, as Fig.1 makes clear. In 1958, the total membership of *yeenggiri* was reckoned to be 36, of whom ten had completed 'stirring the pepper' and of whom only two *duy* members had 'paid all'.

Palace Rituals 1945-58

The palace itself was the starting point of the *Fon*'s peregrinations as chief officiant of the cults of the royal ancestors and the earth.

After his secret installation in Ndzeendzev's *nggay*, and his induction into *ngwerong vitse*, public presentation by *yeengwerong*, and medication by commoner lords in the forecourt, the *Fon* had to prepare himself for his role.¹⁴ He had to see to the establishment of his mother's token grave, if she was dead, with the help of *won jemer fon*. Thereafter the *Fon* had to send sacrificial animals and wine to the head of his mother's patrilineage before he could sacrifice to his royal ancestors: in the past such offerings were also made to the head of his mother's mother's lineage. Only then could he start his first round of sacrifices, starting at the 'god place' at the back of the palace, at other palace sites, through to the *fem*, and from thence to Kovvifem and Taavisa, along a well-marked route, scattered with 'god-places' requiring libations.

In 1957/8 the *Fon* had inaugurated the finger millet harvest in December by ram sacrifices at the *fem*, the *lav wong* at Kovvifem and at Taavisa before an announcement at the market that harvesting could start was made. In late January he had performed the hunting spear sacrifices (see below) at the *kidze kee nto*. In March, at the beginning of the rains, he again sacrificed at the royal burial places. At the beginning of May apotropaic medicines were made at *faay shishwaa* and distributed at farms and cross-roads. A little later women came to the palace to have their hoes asperged by the *ataanto* who were members of the *shishwaa* cult. At various times he was involved in the ritual resolution of land disputes. In August a further round of sacrifices took place at the royal graves and god-places before the transplanting of sorghum. At the start of the dry season the *Fon* donated wine to all the palace associations and the *mfu* houses to start off the weekly round of meetings and invocations.

In the 'fifties the protective *shishmaa* rites surrounding the *kitav* *ke shishmaa*, which normally took place at the starts of the rains and dry season, were in partial abeyance, allegedly because harvests had been good--Tsolo maize had relieved the anxieties of the 'hungry season'. The *Fon*, however, had made sacrifices at cross-roads and entry-points south of Kumbo. In earlier years, when the store was opened, and the 'things of the country' removed, farming had to stop, for earth could not then be cut with hoes. The membership of this group—the *Fon*, Taawong, the seven *vibay* of *duy* origin, the leading *ataanto*', in 1958, had only changed slightly when Mzeka made his enquiries in 1977. The *kitav* was traditionally built by retainers from the old Gham wine-tapping area south-east of Kumbo and its maintenance was the special duty of the senior *taanto*', Maamo.

The *faay baa* (house of the leopard) shown at 19 of Fig. 3 appears not to have been replicated in the new palace, though some of its functions continue in *shunfaay ntari*. It was to this court that royal game was brought for division. A mimetic ritual, *to' baa*, surrounded the first incision of a leopard's belly by the *Fon*, alone save for the presence of Ndzeendzev at the door; Kaberry was privileged to witness this ritual in 1946. The skinning of the leopard was then said to be the special duty of the *kibay* Ndzeendzevtsen; the meat was divided into prescribed portions which no *mtaar* could share.

The *kidze kee nto*' was the starting point for sacrifices repeated by clan and lineage heads who owned a *kidze ke nsii* shrine. It should be noted that a youth presents his first hunting spoil to his *taayiy* who rejoices in his prowess and rewards him. At the *kidze ke nsii* sacrifices, participants proclaim themselves as *won jemer* of their mother's patrician before being marked with camwood, mother's fathers and mother's mother's fathers are invoked, omens are taken by spear-throwing and reconciliation with matrikin is called for if diviners so prescribe, to avoid hunting accidents. At the *kidze kee nto*' participants proclaim themselves as *won nggonjuu duy*, issue of a *duy* daughter. These rites preceded the annual hunt and the presentation of game to the palace by the adult members of war and hunting lodges, and attached boys' groups. Each lodge - the *mfu*' lodges included - had a boys' *palaestra* attached to it, still intermittently used in the 'forties.

Kaberry's 1945 notes place the *faay kibve* on the west of the *shunfaay ntari*. It was here that the body of the dead *Fon* was washed, shaved, oiled and camwooded by the *ayeenwong*, wrapped in royal cloth supplied by Ndzeendzev and supplied with a new *ngwerong* cap. The dead body was carried headfirst through the cleared forecourt to the *fem*, where a grave, marked out with a hoe by *yeenwong*, had been dug by *duy* and *won jemer fon*. It was carried in a sling of royal cloth by the seven *vibay ve kpu*. The procession was led by *taanwong*

striking the state double bell, followed by Ndzeendzev and by *yeewong* carrying the bag of orange royal camwood. We cannot here describe the rich detail of the *Fon*'s burial, but record that before the *Fon*'s body was propped up on the grave-stool made by the *vibay ve kpu*, *yeewong* removes his cap and publicly pronounces his birth-name for the first time since installation, thus bringing his office to an end. When the body was seated, held by camwood posts and hide thongs, when a creeper attached to his wrist is brought to the surface and the grave is about to be filled, *taawong* addressed the *Fon* by name for the last time:

Kpu Binglo, bey bo fon yo' lay: fon ban moo shuy

Binglo dies, but the *Fon* does not pass away; the *Fon* shines like the sun.¹⁵

The grave, a stepped shaft and chamber grave, is likened to the palace. The two steps leading down to the chamber are, Mzeka tells us, alluded to as *maandze nggay* and *taakibu'* respectively; the chamber, lined with raffia poles and royal cloth, and carpeted with leopard skins, as *faay kishiyi*.¹⁶

The royal graves at Kumbo are in thatched unmudded raffia-pole structures with sliding doors on their east face, different in style from the low tunnel-like structures at Kovvifem and in the graveyards of the heads of the Nggamanse and Do' Nggven clans, and distinct from those of other *vibay*, and the *afon* of Oku and Mbiame.

According to Kaberry, who saw them in 1958 with the then *Fon*, *taawong* and *yeewong*, the huts contained single burials, not visited weekly by the *Fon* but in the course of the seasonal sacrifices we have mentioned or when divination or an important occasion required. In the past Ndzeendzev had accompanied them up to the entrance to the huts, where a threefold libation was made. The invocations were preceded and ended with the sounding of the state double bell (*nggem*) and the doors marked with a mixture of oil, palm-wine and camwood. The dead *afon* were informed of important events, either by the *Fon* or by *taawong*.

Some Conclusions

We have not, in our description of the palace, considered its spatial organization in the categories which emerge from the papers presented (in *Paideuma* 31, 1985) by Tardits, Ghomsi and Pradelles. We have, rather, preceded along lines suggested by Warnier in an earlier issue of *Paideuma* (25 [1979], 31) and concentrated on the access to or exclusion from sectors of

the palace of particular social categories, categories of kin, titlesets and cult associations. As Warnier remarked, unfettered access to all parts of the palace in Mankon is the prerogative of the *Fon*. The same is true of Nso', where the *Fon* likewise has to *tang* for this privilege. Rules of a general character were applied to exclude persons of particular social categories from parts of the palace, sometimes explained by psychic or *shiv* incompatibilities: for example, the *mtaar* lords did not normally cross the threshold into *taakibu'* but were, in the past, entertained weekly in the *Fon's* club near the entrance to it; *won nto'* were excluded from the 'village' of *ngwerong* and retainers from the 'village' of *nggiri*, and both from the *feme* Special exceptions to these general rules existed where, for example, a person invested with authority by the *Fon* to do so might cross a line of social category demarcation, as in the case of the *Fon's* retainer messenger to *nggiri* and his princely initiation companions in *ngwerong vitse'*, or as in the case of those individuals who, by virtue of their wealth-creating talents, were admitted to *yeengwerong*. But crossings of thresholds were not made easy in the past. Rules of access have now been relaxed. Yet access to particular areas is still restricted, meetings of associations are closed, and the old timetable of palace activities is retained.

Our approach, as historians, will not be particularly helpful in explaining why such separations or exclusions exist or persist. This would have involved a thorough study of Nso' conceptions of the person and the cosmos and their expression in ritual. But it allows distinctions to be made between recent developments (such as the locations of *nggiri* and its rivalry with *ngwerong*, and the move of *ndzey* from the periphery to the heart of the palace) and the more permanent conceptions they reformulate. Those surrounding the *Fon* himself are of a complex order. For example, he is seen as possessing *sem vifone*, roughly translatable as kingly psychic force, sometimes compared to a high wind at night. He is also seen as vulnerable: former *Fons* are alluded to as *kimforkir*, untimely destroyed or crushed. From this point of view the palace can be seen as a series of barriers designed for the *Fon's* restraint and protection, as the receptacle of this power, and also as a set of sites for mobilizing it. From this point of view, too, the emergence of *nggiri* in its present form can be viewed as an attempt by the dynastic clan at large to transpose the role of princes from that of rival agnates to be kept at a distance to that of protective supports of the dynasty in competition with the representatives of daughter-lines or men bound by oath to the *Fon's* service.

If we have laid some stress on the later tensions and parallels between *nggiri* and *ngwerong*, this should not obscure one of the special features of the Nso' polity, which is not especially evident in the form in which the palace is constructed, namely, the relations between the *Fon* and the *mtaar* lords. These

relations, symbolically expressed in a number of ways, stress the elements of alliance and complementary filiation with maternal kinsfolk. The history of many *vibay* and *duy* lineages is marked by traditions of conflict with the *Fon* over privileges and precedence. In the view of *mtaar* it was the *Fon*'s folk, ambitious princes, or intriguing councillors, who were liable to be killed for *maleficium* against the *Fon*. The *Fon* was viewed by them, rather, as the centre of a web of affinity which stretched allover Nso'. They were his *ataayiy* who might send a little affliction from time to time, but who would never bring about his premature end.

Endnotes

1. Gham and Ba' divisions for public work exist within Oku villages and Gham/Ba' division of titles in Papiakum (Baba'). Nso' produce various etymologies for these terms but are not agreed as to their meaning.

2. At least six versions were collected by Jeffreys and Kaberry. In the now commonest Ndzeendzev version the ancestor, a wealthy and loyal trader, redeems a young Nso' prince, the preferred heir, from captivity, fosters him and eventually presents him to the *mtaar*. He persuades them to donate daughters to the young *Fan* as wives and does so himself. He is rewarded with special privileges. In older versions these are given by the father of the redeemed prince. Other themes--the regulation of royal marriage, the discovery of the lost prince by his sister, the exchange of hoes for palm oil in regional trade, and the introduction of finger millet in the prince's hair--are found in some versions. The *Fan* and Ndzeendzev are seen to 'split the beak together' (have mutual sacrificial obligations); each was the marriage-lord of the other's first-born daughter as would be the case if each was the other's *taayiy*. Likewise, part of the investiture of each was conducted in the other's residence. The office of the Great Councillor grew in importance with the long-lived 'Toombu', who served four *afon* and died in 1925.

Little is known of his predecessor. The eponym of the title-line (of seven in 1958) attaches to the second, supposedly elevated by a Taavisa *Fan*. Cf. Mzeka, 31-36, 41-51; Kaberry 1957, 1959; Jeffreys MSS.

3. In 1958 the *mtaar* clans and patrilineages of the *ayeefon* of five Kumbo rulers were recalled. The practice of establishing memorial graves after burial

is fairly general for important title-holders and a bag of earth and token stones may be transported over long distances when compounds are moved.

4. Formerly recruited from a tributary chiefdom renowned for smelting and smithing.

5. Mzeka (op. cit., 31) records the view that the set of seven was an innovation of Bi'fon I and that formerly all elderly wives could be *kɛfem se vikiy nto*'.

6. *Kor* (Kaberry FN, 1963) as a mortuary society may display aggressively and challenge *nggiri* with dancers disguised by foliage accompanied by women carrying spears.

7. A *kibu*' must have two doors. Formerly a house with two doors was permitted only at the palace, to the *vibay* Ndzeendzev, Taangkum and Tsenla' (the head of the *mtaar* Nggamanse clan) and to princesses given in marriage to commoner lords. It is a privilege granted by the *Fan*.

8. Such an occasion was witnessed in 1958, when the *mtaar* lords, carrying *kikeng* (*Dracaena*) stems, complained that the *Fan*'s agents had been receiving bribes and improperly allocating land. Amendment was promised, large quantities of wine distributed and a ram sacrificed to a *kingka* (invocation) by Faay Sangfir (Tang Clan) who led the *Gham* lords: Faay Ngkim Vekovi (Ngkim clan) led those of Ba'. Nowadays the spokesman briefly enters *taakibu*' to deliver his complaint.

9. The *shiv* (medicine) embodied in these masks was considered harmful to princes and women. Per *contra*, that associated with the northern commoner cult of *ndzenggong* was viewed as incompatible with the masks of *ngwerong* and *nggiri*.

10. The lesser *ngwerong* in the past policed the use of fires but we have no evidence that it dealt with the pollution caused by accidental fires.

11. The possession of a *mbang ngwerong* protected raffia palm stands in particular. The *Fon*'s wine calabashes, marked with *kikeng*, were carried with ceremony, all making way for the carriers who were at pains not to come into bodily contact with them. The wine calabashes of *vibay* were marked with a *Ficus* leaf and exempt from confiscation.

12. In Tang the corresponding instrument of *maa nggiri*, differs from that of Bamum (Tardits [1980] 637-8), which is also typical of the male anti-witchcraft cults formerly imported into Nso' from the north. As Nkwi and Warnier remark ([1982], 58) the renaming of older societies and the sharing of paraphernalia is frequent.

13. In the past princes setting up at a distance from the capital worked up a local *nggiri*, for which they could use the royal cloth: these local societies were subordinate to the *Fon's nggiri* which monopolized the *shin* peculiar to it. That of Sam III (Sheey Mbinglo) at Ndzaram, when he was a prince, was said to have outshone the *Fon's nggiri* in display.

14. Both Mzeka and Kaberry collected conflicting accounts of the *Fon's* medication by commoner lords. Kaberry's older informants held the view that the protection of addition to *ngwerong* was required in that of the *mtaar*.

15. The account we give of the *Fon's* burial does not accord in all respects with that of Mzeka, 32-36. Ours relies on the earlier accounts of royal burial priests which purported to describe that of Bi'fon I.

16. Skull-removal and skull reburial or preservation were denied by Jeffreys' and Kaberry's informants. According to Jeffreys (1960 MS) the *Fon*-elect was given a bag containing the *exuviae* of the dead *Fon* to hold, but according to Kaberry's informants this was not included among the 'things of the country'.

References

Published Sources

Ankermann, Bernhard, 1919: 'Bericht tiber eine ethnographische Forschungsreise ins Grasland von Kamerun', *zeitschrift fur Ethnologie*, 42, 288-310.

Chem-Langhee, Bongfen, 1984: 'Southern Cameroons Traditional Authorities and the Nationalist Movement', 1953-1961, *Afrika Zamani*, 14/15, 147-63.

- Chilver, E.M. and Kaberry, P.M., 1960: 'From Tribute to Tax in a Tikar Chiefdom', *Africa*, 30 (1) 1-19.
- 1968: *Traditional Bamenda: The pre-colonial history and ethnology of the Bamenda Grassfields*. Government Printer, Buea.
- Emonts, Johannes, 1927: *Ins steppen- und Bergland Innerkameruns*, 2nd edition; Aachen Missionsdruckerei, Aachen (illustr.)
- Fonka, L.S. and Banboye, William, 1960: *Nso' Marriage customs, with Methods of Wife Acquisition*, Nooremac Press, Lagos.
- Glauning, Hptm., Hans: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, V. 17 (1906), pp. 236-241 (Aug.-Sept. 1905), 516 (undated), 705-6 (April-June 1906), Map.
- Hassert, Kurt, 1917: *Beiträge zur Landeskunde der Grasbochländer Nordwest-Kameruns*, E.S. Mittler und Sohn, Berlin (Maps, illustr.).
- Kaberry, P.M., 1952: *Women of the Grassfields*, H.M.S.O., London (Map, illustr.).
- 1957: 'Myth and Ritual: some recent theories', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical studies*, (London), 4.
- 1959: 'Traditional Politics in Nsaw', *Africa*, 29 (4), 366-382.
- 1962: 'Retainers and Royal Households in the Cameroon Grassfields', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 10, 282-298.
- 1969: 'Witchcraft of the Sun', in: Douglas & Kaberry (eds.), *Man in Africa*, Tavistock publications, London, 175-195.
- Koelle, S.W., 1963: *Polyglotta Africana* (reprint). Akademischer Verlag, Graz.
- Koloss, Hans-Joachim, 1980: 'Götter und Ahnen, Hexen und Medizin--zum Weltbild in Oku', in: Walter Raunig (ed.), *Schwarzafrikaner*, Umschau-Verlag, Frankfurt/M. (illustr.).
- Lantum, D.N. and Banboye, William, 1961: 'Nso' History, II', *Nso News Journal*, V, 27-30.
- Ledermann, C., 1912: 'Eine botanische Wanderung nach Deutsch-Adamaua', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 24, 20-25.

- McCulloch, Merran, and others, 1954: *Peoples of the Central Cameroons* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa), O.U.P., London.
- Mzeka, Paul N., 1980: *The Core Culture of Nso*, Jerome Radin Co., Agawam (Mass.) (illustr.).
- Nkwi, Paul Nchoji, 1974: *Traditional Government and Social Change*, University Press, Friburg.
- , 1979: 'Cameroon Grassfield Chiefs and Modern Politics', *Paideuma*, 25, 99-115.
- Nkwi, P.N. and Warnier, J.-P., 1982: *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*, Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde (illustr.).
- Tardits, Claude, 1980: *Le royaume Bamoum*, Armand Colin, Paris (Maps, illustr.).
- Warnier, Jean-Pierre, 1979: 'La polarite culture-nature entre le chef et Takoengoe a Mankon', *Paideuma*, 25, 21-39.
- , 1983: *Sociologie du Bamenda pre-colonial*, Doctorat d'etat Thesis, Universite de Paris X.

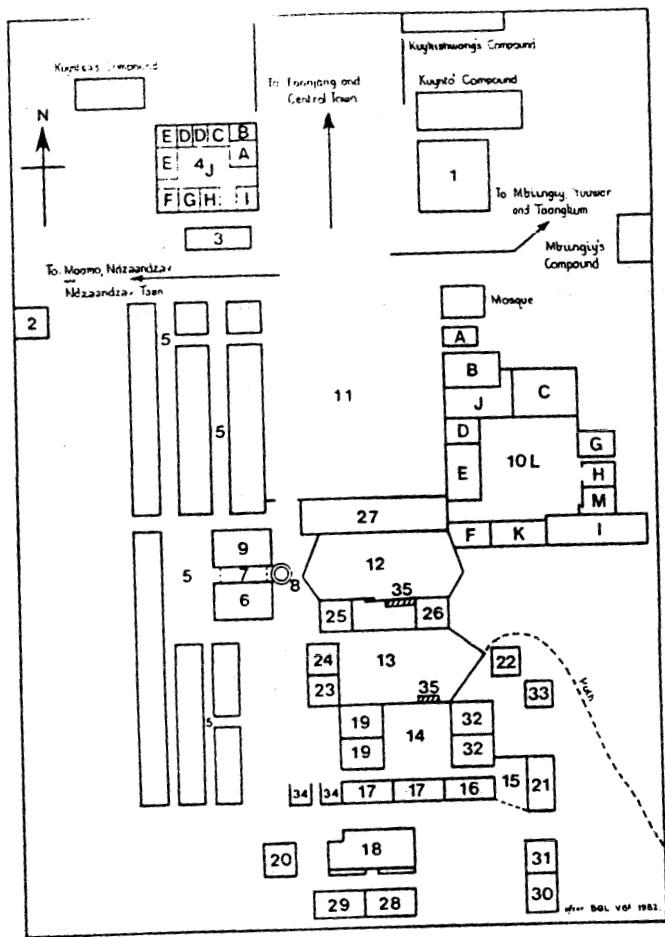
Unpublished Sources

- Bridges, W.M., 1934: Bansa Re-assessment Report, (TS), Buea Archives and Rhodes House Library, Oxford (MSS Africana).
- , 1982: 'Slavery in Nso', (TS) (forthcoming). Jeffreys, M.D.W.: Bamenda Tribal Notes (TS, n.d., but mainly 1937-45); in Bamenda Archives and Dept. of Sociology, Yaounde.
- , Bansa Tribal Notes 1958-60 (MS): Chilver Collection; Material from the latter is incorporated in 'The Wiya Tribe', *African Studies*, 3 and 4, 1962. 'Oku Blacksmiths', *Nigerian Field*, XXVI, 1961, and File B.646/836, Bamenda Archives.
- Kaberry, P.M.: Fieldnotes and transcriptions from administrative files 1945-8; 1958; 1960; 1963: deposited in the British Library of Economic and Political Science (L.S.E.), London. Includes reports and correspondence

from Nso' informants, in particular Faay Bangka', William Banboye, Vincent Jaff and Jacob Sangmo, members of the Nso' History Society.

Koloss, H.-J., 1977: Personal communications (Sketch Map of the Oku Palace, with key, photographs of maskers).

Fig. 1 *Nto Nso'* from 1960 Key



Key

Key
 1: Lav mfu' Gham; 2: Lav mfu' Ba'; 3: Fām; 4: La' nggirri; A: Nggay; B: Mban kikum; C: Lav moo mvəm; D: Lav mabu'; e: Lav yeengirri; F: Lav moo; G: Lav moorifəm; H: Lav shitaamaandza; I: Lav nshiy se lav; J: Courtyard; 5: Nnan; 6: Lav Maama'; 7: Say se ayeefon (token graves); 8: Kidza; 9: Nggay; 10: Ngwengrong la; A: Lav won jemer; B: Koko'; C: Nggay; D: Lav Sheey won lav ye teri; E: Lav kibarangko'; F: Shuu kitav; G: Lav kinggaayasi; H: Nggo'; I: Nggay yeengwerong; J: Courtyard; K: Courtyard; L: Maandza ngwengrong (main courtyard); 11: Maandza ngwengrong; 12: Taakibi'; 13: Shuufaay ntari; 14: Shuufaay kirasii; 15: Kirasii ke Fon; 16: Faay kishiiy (used by Fon Sam III); 17: Faay kishiiy (used by Fon Bi'fon II); 18: New Faay kishiiy (under construction); 19: Faay nshiy se lav; 20: Faay ndzay; 21: Faay (Fon's kitchen); 22: Faay shishwaa; 23: Faay kibva; 24: Faay ataanto'; 25: Faay vibay; 26: Fon's office; 27: Kibu'; 28: Kitav ke wong; 29: Kitav ke bom (wine store); 30: Kitav ke kor; 31: Kitav ke mengka' (firewood store); 32: Faay nshwi; 33: Ngka' (animal pen); 34: Garage; 35: Dais.

Fig. 1. Nto' Nso' from 1960

1. *Lav mfu'Gham*. 2. *Lav mfu'Ba'* 3. *Fem*. 4. *La'nggiri*, comprising:-

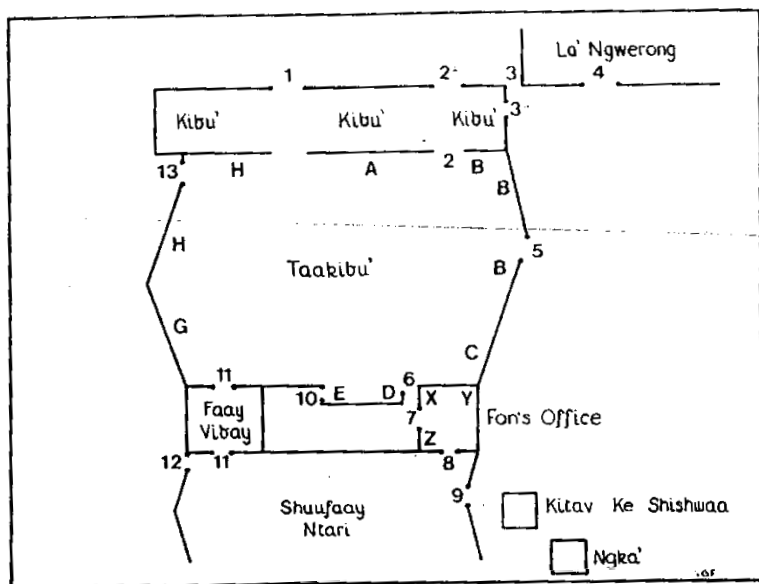
A. *Nggay*. B. *Mban kikum*. C. *Lav moo mvem*. D. *Lav Mabuv*. E. *Lav yeenggiri*. F. *Lav moo*. G. *Lav moorifem*. H. *Lav shitaamaandze*. I. *Lav nshiy se lave* J. courtyard.

5. *Nsan*. 6. *Lav Maamav*. 7. *Say se ayeefon* (token graves). 8. *Kidze*. 9. *Nggay*. 10. *Ngwerong la'*, comprising:-

A. *Lav won jemer*. B. *Koko'*. C. *Nggay*. D. *Lav sheey woo lav ye teri*. E. *Lav kibaranko'*. F. *Shuu kitav*. G. *Lav kinggaayasi*. H. *Nggo'*. I. *Nggay yeengwerong*. J. courtyard. K. courtyard. L. *Maandze ngwerong* (main courtyard).

11. *Mandze nggay*. 12. *Taakibu'*. 13. *Shunfay ntari*. 14. *Shunfay kiresii*. 15. *Kiresii ke Fon*. 16. *Faay kishiiy* (used by Fon Sem III). 17. *Faay kishiiy* (used by Fon Bi'fon II). 18. New *Faay kishiiy* (under construction). 19. *Faay nshiy se lave*. 20. *Faay ndzey*. 21. *Faay* (Fon's kitchen). 22. *Faay shishmaa*. 23. *Faay kibve*. 24. *Faay ataanto'*. 25. *Faay vibay*. 26. *Fon's office*. 27. *Kibu'*. 28. *Kitav ke wong*. 29. *Kitav ke bom* (wine store). 30. *Kitav ke kor*. 31. *Kitav ke mengka'* (firewood store). 32. *Faay nshwi*. 33. *Ngka'* (animal pen). 34. *Garage*. 35. *Dais*.

Fig. 2 Access to *taakibu'* Key Doors and entrances



Key

Doors and entrances

1: Entrance from *maandze nggay* to *taakibu* through *kibu*; 2a: Fon's normal exit from *kibu* to *maandze nggay*, now sealed; 2: Fon's passage from *taakibu* to *kibu*; 3: *Yeengwerong*'s exit when the Fon is in procession. Now acts as the Fon's exit from the *nto*, and indicates whether or not the Fon is in the palace. 3a: Passage through which the Fon meets *yeengwerong* in readiness for a procession; 4: Exit from *ngwerong la* to *mbiv faay*; 5: Entrance to *taakibu* from *ngwerong la*; 6: Fon's passage from *taakibu* to the Fon's office; 7: General door to the Fon's office; 8: General exit from the Fon's office to *shuufaay ntari*; 9: Entrance to *shuufaay ntari* from *ngwerong la*; 10: General passage from *taakibu* to Fon's office; 11: General passage from *taakibu* to *shuufaay ntari*; 12: General entrance to *shuufaay ntari* from *nsan*; 13: General entrance to *taakibu* from *nsan*.

Seating positions in *taakibu*

A: *Ataanto*; B: *Nshiy se lav* and *wonto*; C: *Ataawong*, *ayewong* and *ayau*; D: Fon Nso; E: Fon Mbiame, Fon Oku and important foreign *afon*; F: The rest of the *afon* in Nso who can sit on a *kava* in the palace, and important foreign visitors; G: *Vibay*, headed by *Ndzoondzo* and *Taungkum*; H: *Duy*.

Seating positions in the Fon's office

X: *Vibay* and important visitors, whether or not foreign (on chairs); Y: *Ataanto*, *wonto* and *nshiy se lav* (on bench); Z: The Fon (on *kava*).

Fig. 2. Access to *taakibu*

1. Entrance from *maandze nggay* to *taakibu* through *kibu*.

2a. Fon's normal exit from *kibu'* to *maandze nggay*, now sealed.

2. Fon's passage from *taakibu'* to *kibu'*.

3. *Yeengwerong's* exit when the Fon is in procession. Now acts as the Fon's exit from the *nto'*, and indicates whether or not the Fon is in the palace.

3a. Passage through which the Fon meets *yeengwerong* in readiness for a procession.

4. Exit from *ngwerong la'* to *mbiv faay*.

5. Entrance to *taakibu'* from *ngwerong la'*.

6. Fon's passage from *taakibu'* to the Fon's office.

7. General door to the Fon's office.

8. General exit from the Fon's office to *shuufaay ntari*.

9. Entrance to *shuufaay ntari* from *ngwerong la'*.

10. General passage from *taakibu'* to the Fon's office.

11. General passage from *taakibu'* to *shuufaay ntari*.

12. General entrance to *shuufaay ntari* from *nsan*.

13. General entrance to *taakibu'* from *nsan*.

Seating positions in *taakibu'* A. *Ataanto'*. B. *Nshiy se lav* and *wonto'*. C. *Ataawong*, *ayeewong* and *ayaa*. D. Fon Nso'. E. Fon Mbiame, Fon Oku and important foreign *afon*. F. The rest of the *afon* in Nso' who can sit on a *kava'* in the palace and important foreign visitors. G. *vibay*, headed by Ndzeendzev and Taangkum. H. DUY.

Seating positions in the Fon's office x. *vibay* and important visitors, whether or not foreign (on chairs). Y. *Aaanto'*, *wonto'* and *nshiy se lav* (on bench). Z. The Fon (on *kava'*).

1. *Nggiri la'i* connected ranges of huts and a meeting hall round courtyard.
2. *Femi* five unmudded grave-huts.
3. *Lav mfu' Ghami* with carved posts and doorway, an enclosed yard for *wonle nggwa* behind.
4. *Lav mfu' Ba'*; as above.
5. Fon's garage.
6. *Nsan*; containing over 50 houses, stores, *nggay*, memorial graves of *ayee fon*, and cleared dancing yard.
7. *Kidze ke nto'*.
8. *Kibu'*.
9. *Nggwa kibu'*; Fon's drinking club in enclosed yard containing wine store.
10. *Shun kibu'*; entrance and sacrificial site with raised threshold and carved surround.
11. Fon's private door, marked with *kirang*.
12. Entrance to *ngwerong*, marked with *kirang*.
13. (A-C); rain shelters and basking houses, one a store in 1958, three formerly used as dormitories for domestics and pages.
14. Raised dais; lined with bamboos, facing *taakibu'*.
15. Old Treasury, the counting house for tax-money in German times, containing stores for visitors.
16. Protected stores, giving on to *shunfaay ntari*.
- 16a. *Faay kibve*.

17. *Faay tang*; formerly used as a dormitory at night, meeting place for those who had *tang faay kishiiy*, traces of carving. 18. *Faay and kitav ke shishwaa*; marked with *kirang*.

18a. *Kiresii*; screened, where Fon Bi'fon I sometimes spent the Night.

18b. Described as *ngka*, but containing grindstones.

19. *Faay baa*; where incision of leopards takes place, and also where young princes are fed with meat - carved posts, and surround of entry marked with *kirang*.

19a. store for gifts and *nshwi*.

20. *Faay kishiiyi* surrounded by *faay se ngwerong vikiyinto* dormitory, kitchens and stores used by attendant wives and pages. 21. *Kitav ke cong*; women's society store marked with *kirang*.

21a. Fon's meat and food store.

21b. Fon's wine store, marked with *kirang*.

21c. Tree stump surrounded by stones; formerly the Fon used to sit out here.

22. *Faay kishiiy* of Bi'fon I facing screened courtyard.

22a. Resting place for *nshiy se lav* fetching water, and containing storage jars.

22b. Fon's cloth store and wardrobe.

22c. Former kitchen and sitting place for wives.

23. *Kibu' ke wong*; marked with *kirang*, formerly a store for women's societies, and sacrificial site leading into *shunfaay ntangri*, court of sacrifice.

24. *La'ngwerong*; closed to all women and non-members, but said to contain two *anggay*, *lav ye teri*, *nggo*, several courtyards, *koko* leading to

taamban or *lav won jemer* with three doors, stores for firewood, thatching grass, etc., and pens for animals.

25. *Taamban*; containing houses of *won jemer fon* and courtyard. Some foundations and stores were visible towards the kola grove on the S.E. of the palace.

26. Kola tree.

27. A bed of *Dracaena*.

The Transfer Of Power And Authority In Nto' Nso'⁴

VERKIJKA G. FANSO & B. CHEM-LANGHEE

This paper deals with the transfer of power and authority from one team of leaders to another in *nto'* Nso' or Nso' palace. Specifically, it discusses the position of the *Fon*, supreme ruler or king, of Nso' in the society, his death and burial, the selection and installation of the new *Fon*, and the functions, selection, and installation of those persons who must be installed with the new *Fon* within the same period to complete the process. These persons include: Faay Taawong, Lord Father—or Lord Elder—of-the-Country, *taawong* for short, the prince-priest who acts as the deputy high priest to the *Fon*; Yaa *yeewong*, Queen Mother-of-the-Country, usually referred to simply as *yeewong*, the princess-priest who assists the *Fon* or the *taawong* during rituals and sacrifices; and the Yaa Yeefon, Queen Mother-of-the-Fon, *yeefon* for short, the real or putative mother of the *Fon*. It should be stressed here that the *taawong*, *yeewong* and *yeefon* of the defunct ruler do not lose their titles after their successors have been installed. They continue to function in the same way as before until their successors have become acquainted with their new functions. Indeed, even thereafter, the former *taawong* and *yeewong* are occasionally called upon to perform special rituals and sacrifices.

The description that follows, unless otherwise indicated refers to the situation as it was in 1907, 1910, 1947, 1972 and 1983, as recounted by the informants of W.M. Bridges (MS 1934), M.D.W. Jeffreys (MSS 1937-1942, 1958/9), P.M. Kaberry (MSS and 1952, 1957, 1959, 1962, 1969), E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry (1960, 1968), and Paul N. Mzeka (1980), whose important study has been augmented by recent enquiries and personal observations by Chem-Langhee and Fanzo.¹

⁴ This chapter was first published in *Paideuma* 35(1989):49-66 and is reproduced here with some modifications arising from later fieldwork and restudy of Kaberry's early notes, by kind permission of the editor of this journal, Dr Beatrix Heintze, and the Librarian of B.L.P.E.S (London School of Economics).

Our most recent well placed informants include: the following princes, John Maimo, Fonfoka, Sankie Maimo, Emmanuel Nkemdzeka Mbinglo, Joseph Chin Fon, and Francis wirngo Mbinglo, the latter a candidate who resigned from the post of *taawong* two hours after his installation, for reasons to be seen later; the following *ataawong* (sing. *taawong*), Taawong woo Bamkov, Taawong woo Bamnggam, and Taawong woo Mba' who is the *taawong* of the present *Fon*; Yeefon woo Jakiri and the *yeefon* of the present *Fon*; the following *nsheelav se faay* (sing. *nshiy lav faay*) or *Fon*'s personal pages, Mfoome Gham, Lukong Chengwey, and Sheey Langwa; the following *ataw ngwerong* (sing. *tav ngwerong*) or titled leaders of *ngwerong*, the regulatory society, Sheey Dzee, Sheey Sarway, Sheey Bamfem, and Sheey ngkun; the following principal *ataa nto'* (sing. *taa nto'*) or retainer lineage heads who are palace stewards, Faay Mbiinggiy, Faay Faanjang, Faay Kuynto' Nsheelav, and Faay Nseene; the following principal *vibay* (sing. *kibay*) or great lords and councillors of the *Fon*, Shuufaay Taangkum and Shuufaay Lun, the following *afon* (sing. *fon*) of Nso' or rulers or kings of Nso', Ngga' Bi'fon II (1972-1983), and Ngga' Bi'fon III (1983-); and Dr D.N. Lantum, a *duy* or cadet royal, who observed and played an active part in the burials of Sembum III in 1972 and Ngga' Bi'fon II in 1983, and witnessed the installations of Ngga' Bi'fon II in 1972 and Ngga' Bi'fon III in 1983. It is important to note that, except for the princes and Dr Lantum, all these are crucial functionaries of the Nso' palace.

The *Fan*

It is not certain whether when the Nso' people speak of the world they imply the whole world or the world of Nso'. But they believe that their *Fon* is at the centre of the world, which revolves around him, from where he gives directives for almost every activity in Nso'. He 'owns' all the land and people in Nso' and feeds as many mouths as there are people therein. He was credited with the power of life and death, is everything but God.² That is why he mediates, as the high priest, between God, through his ancestors, and his people. It explains why he is also liable to "death." These are the powers and authority which he retains as an ancestor but which are also transferred to his successor who is connected to him during his installation.

According to the Nso', however, the *Fon* of Nso' never dies: he is simply "missing" or the Nso' Sun "is quenched." As soon as the *Fon* of Nso' is "missing", the necessary precautions are taken by *ngwerong* to prepare the populace for the sad news and the prolonged mourning that attends the death of the *Fon*. The *nsheelav* (sing. *nshiy lav*) or *ngwerong*'s pages or retainers are sent to every quarter and suburb of the capital, Kimbo', and to all the

villages of Nso' proper to announce that the Nso' Sun is "quenched." Emissaries, who usually take along with them a fowl each, are sent to the chiefdoms and village-chiefdoms of the Nso' fondom, once more to the ancestral kingdom of Kimi, to the neighbouring kingdoms claiming ancestral links with Nso' and to the other fondoms or kingdoms, such as Bali Nyonga, which have special diplomatic relations with Nso', to announce the news.

While this information process is going on, arrangements for burial, which should take place within the shortest possible time, are being made. The corpse is taken away from the *faay kishiyy*, the *Fon*'s bed chamber, or from wherever the death occurred, to the *faay kibva*, the royal mortuary. Here it is washed, camwooded, wrapped in the royal cloth, *kilanglang* (pl. *vilanglang*), and capped with the *tan mban*, the *ngwerong* cap of rank and dignity with which the *Fon* is installed. During these preparations, indeed until the corpse is taken to the *fam*, the royal graveyard and also the hut over the royal grave, the *taawong* plays the state gong, *nggem wong*, round the corpse at intervals. Then, one ram or he-goat is slaughtered in sacrifice at the *fam* before the digging of the grave commences. And, as soon as the digging of the grave begins, another ram or he-goat is slaughtered in sacrifice at the *nggay*, the family assembly hall of the palace. The preparation of the grave itself follows a special procedure.

The grave, which is usually larger and deeper than a normal grave, is double-terraced on one of the long walls, Symbolizing some parts of the palace. The upper terrace represents the *maandza nggay*, the forecourt where the *Fon* receives the general populace. The lower terrace stands for the *taakibu'*, the audience court where the *Fon* receives his councillors and important personalities. opposite the lower terrace, a hole about one metre wide, one metre long, and one metre high from the floor level of the grave, representing the *faay kishiyy*, is dug in the other long wall of the grave. It is in this hole that the corpse will be seated before burial. While the digging of the grave is in process, a bamboo *kava'* or throne, bamboo decoration boards, and grave-hut are prepared. After the digging, the *maandza nggay*, the *taakibu'*, and the *faay kishiyy* of the grave are decorated with the bamboo boards overlaid with *kilanglang* and decorated with local wall mats, *mban*. The bamboo *kava'* is then put in position in the *faay kishiyy* on a dais covered with the skin of a leopard, a Symbol of royalty, power and authority, for the *Fon* is the only person in Nso' who can sleep on a leopard skin and put his feet on it.

When the grave is ready, the corpse is conveyed to the *fam* for the last rites and burial. First of all, the palace is cleared of persons, such as *nsheelav*, *won nto'* (sing. *wan nto'*) or princes and princesses, and foreigners, who are not

allowed to see the corpse of the *Fon*. Then the corpse, still wrapped in *kilanglang*, is carried to the *fam* in a procession led by Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, the great lord and leader of the *Fon*'s councillors. He is followed, first, by the *taawong* playing the *nggem wong* at intervals and, then, by *yeewong* cleansing the path with sprinklings of *kiwooy* (pl. *viwooy*), a slimy liquid consisting of palm wine or water and a herbal infusion used for removing pollution and for blessing by aspersing with a whisk. The *yeewong* with the *kiwooy* is followed by the other *ataawong* and *ayeewong* (sing. *taawong* and *yeewong*), if there are any. Then come the great lords of death, *vibay ve kpu*, also known as the great cadet royal lords, *vi bay ve duy*, or the great lords of sacrifice, *vibay ve ntangri*, carrying the corpse, head first. At the *fam*, the corpse is asperged by *yeewong*, and the burial invocation, *kingka*, is said by *taawong* and *yeewong*. Then, the *yeewong* removes the *tan mban* from the head of the corpse and preserves it for the installation of the new *Fon*, in order to ensure continuity. As she removes the *tan mban* from the head of the corpse, she publicly pronounces the birth-name of the dead *Fon*, in order to remind him of the name by which he will be addressed as an ancestral *Fon* during future sacrifices and libations.

Then comes the positioning of the corpse in the grave with its own rites. First, the corpse is taken into the *faay kishiiy* and seated on the bamboo *kava*' with its feet resting on the leopard skin, *juv baa*, to underscore his royalty, power and authority as the ancestral *Fon* of Nso', which elements are also transferred to his successor. The corpse is secured in position with pieces of camwood and *kirum*, which are very strong trees in Nso', said to be very resistant to destruction by ants or bacteria. In front of the corpse are placed the hind legs of the ram or he-goat, slaughtered in sacrifice at the *fem* before the digging of the grave began, as the dead *Fon*'s share of the sacrifice. Salt is sprinkled on these hind legs to preserve and flavour them. Salt in a new container is also placed in front of the corpse for unspecified reasons, but perhaps because salt is one of the "things-of-the-earth." Likewise, the entrails of the slaughtered ram or he-goat are placed in front of the corpse on a broad forest leaf called *kiman* to appease the earth, although we were not told how the appeasement takes place.

A royal drinking cup, *bom*³, is forced into the left hand of the corpse, again to underline his power and authority as an ancestral *Fon*, since only the *Fon* drinks from the left hand in Nso'. A long-necked gourd or pourer, *nggiv*, containing wine is also placed before the corpse. Then a long Indian bamboo with one end reaching out of the grave is inserted into the *bom* to conduct future libation wine to the ancestral *Fon*. After that, a pliant forest climber resembling *Passiflora* called *koonte* is tied on the right wrist of the corpse, as a

symbol of the deceased *Fon*'s heroism, and led out of the grave to grow, in order to connect the dead brave hero with the living brave heroes.

Once *koonte* is tied on the right wrist of the corpse and led out of the grave, the filling of the grave, which is the duty of the *duy*, begins. The grave is filled in gradually with the earth at intervals and stamped down by trampling upon to the rhythm of *nsii* music, a special music played during the burial of Nso' heroes, brave men and the aged. When the grave is completely filled in, a grass-thatched bamboo hut, *fem*, is built over it. A ram or he-goat is then slaughtered in the first sacrifice to the most recent ancestral *Fon* on the grave and its blood allowed to run down the *koonte* into the earth, the flow of the blood being read as an omen. The final invocation is made by the *taawong* and *yeewong* to end the burial and clear the way for the beginning of the mourning and the final selection of the new *Fon*⁴.

Although all likely candidates for the fonship of Nso' are known and carefully observed and studied by those concerned with the choice of a new *Fon*, the search for the successor seriously begins from the moment the *Fon*'s illness is considered fatal. However, the final decision is made after the Nso' Sun is "quenched", very often before the burial is completed, in order to preempt any struggle for the throne and shorten the interregnum.

Our informants were not agreed as to the composition of the informal succession council that comes together as such only to select the new *Fon*. According to the surviving participants of the 1910 selection, interviewed by Kaberry in July 1945, namely, Shuufaay Lun, Shuufaay Yuuwar and *yeewong* woo Nturkuy, the others were Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, Shuufaay Taangkum, Shuufaay Ndzeendzevtsen and Taawong, which essentially puts the choice in the hands of the *vi bay vee Kov* who are also councillors to the *Fon*, *shuufaay* meaning great lord, and the *ataawong* and *ayeewong* although not all of the latter were named. The *taawong* of Ngga' Bi'fon I, in reference to the 1947 selection, listed the *vibay vee saamba* (the *vibay vee Kov* plus Shuufaay Shuv added to the group by Ngga' Bi'fon I), the three great lords of mtaar or free commoner lineages, *vibay ve Nso'*, *taawong*, *yeewong*, Faay Faanjang and Faay Maamo, faay meaning lord, as members of the council. This list includes the ten great lords of the land, the prince-priest, the princess-priestess, and the representatives of the seven retainer lords, *ataanto' vee saamba*. In 1946, Kaberry noted that only two of the three *vibay ve Nso'*, Shuufaay 'Tsenla' and Shuufaay Run, were then included in the list given to her.

The confusion does not end here. According to Mzeka, the members of the 1972 council included Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, Shuufaay Taangkum, Shuufaay Ndzeendzevtsen, Shuufaay Yuuwar, Shuufaay Lun, *taawong*, and *yeewong*, with Shuufaay Ndzeendzev and Shuufaay Taangkum representing

ngwerong which, in this sense, includes the *ataanto' vee saamba* and the *atav ngwerong*. Thus the decision was in the hands of the seven great lord-councillors to the *Fon*, and *taawong* and *yeewong* with *ngwerong* playing an unspecified role via representation. In 1983, Chem-Langhee, who witnessed the transfer of power and authority of that year, counted as members of the succession council, Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, Shuufaay Ndzeendzevtsen, Shuufaay Shuv, *taawong*, *yeewong*, the *ataanto' vee saamba*, and *atav ngwerong*, with the last two groups playing a decisive role. consequently, the membership of the council in 1983 was made up of the seven great lord-councillors to the *Fon*, *taawong*, *yeewong*, and *ngwerong*, the last represented by the *ataanto' vee saamba* and the *atav ngwerong*. After a heated and prolonged debate, *ngwerong* virtually imposed its will on the other members with the blessing of the Taawong woo Bamkov, Taawong woo Bamnggam, and *yeewong* woo Kiyan, who joined the group later to break the deadlock between *ngwerong* on the one hand and the *vibay* on the other, by calling upon *ngwerong* to decide who will be their "father."

Another element of the confusion involves the role of the *mtaar* lords, *ataala' mtaar*, free commoner lords, in the selection of the new *Fon*. According to some informants, the actual choice of the candidate is made, after divination, by the *mtaar* lords, the original owners of Nso' land, after which they inform *ngwerong* and Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, both of whom cannot alter the choice. Others support this view but state that *ngwerong* and Shuufaay Ndzeendzev have the right to alter the choice given them by the *mtaar* lords. still others say that the *mtaar* lords are called upon to advise on the choice, which they do through divination, only when there is an important division among the decision-makers or when the competition between candidates is so close that the choice-makers cannot decide without recourse to divination, which can be carried out on behalf of the whole Nso' nation only by the *mtaar* lords.

We cannot resist the temptation to attempt making sense out of this apparent confusion. What suggests itself first to us is that the situation has evolved with time. In view of the importance of the *mtaar* lords in the society, particularly when it comes to issues involving the *Fon* or the gods of the land, it would appear that, formerly, the *mtaar* lords played a more important role in the selection of the new *Fon* than *ngwerong*, which then included the *atav ngwerong*, *ataanto' vee saamba*, Shuufaay Ndzeendzev and Shuufaay Taangkum. More recently the *mtaar* lords were given a secondary role as an informal council emerged, composed of *ngwerong*, whose members also need not all be present, *taawong*, *yeewong*, and the *vibay vee saamba*, whose members also need not all be present. The membership of the three *vibay ve*

Nso' appears incidental and shortlived. As it stands now, we are led to conclude that the informal succession council consists of *ngwerong*, *vibay vee saamba*, *ataawong*, and *ayeewong*, all of whose members need not be present each time the selection of the new *Fon* is taking place.

The selection of the candidate itself is guided by certain principles. The first of these is maturity. The *Nso'* feel very strongly that their *Fon* should be a healthy grown-up person, old enough to qualify as the father of the nation. Thus, there is the tendency to avoid direct succession in which the son takes over from the father, and the tendency to encourage the succession of the sons of earlier *afon* (sing. *fon*), who by then should be old enough to present a fatherly figure. The second principle is procreation. The *Nso'* consider it a curse for their *Fon* not to be procreative, and feel that the person who sacrifices for the productivity of the land and its people should himself be procreative. The third principle is simply that the candidate must be of a *mtaar* mother, in order to ensure adherence to the "Act of Union" between the *Nso'* immigrants from Rifem or Kimi and the indigenous inhabitants of the original *Nso'* land, the *Nso'* *mtaar*, and make him acceptable to the *Nso'* royal ancestors, earth, and gods.

The fourth principle, which concerns the period the prince was born to his father, has recently become controversial. Some informants say, as Kaberry's informants did a generation ago (Kaberry 1959:370), that the candidate must be a *wan nto'* of the "leopard skin", which means that he must be born to his father when the latter is already *Fon*. They explain that children who are born to their father before their father becomes the *Fon* fall in the category of *won won nto'* (sing. *wan wan nto'*), sons' sons, who are excluded from succession to the throne of *Nso'*. This view is supported by the bulk of the evidence on earlier successions from Sembum II (La'nggam, d.1907) onwards. Others, particularly the princes, old and young, hold that the candidate must be the son of a *Fon* or, otherwise put, the son of a *wiyy nto'* (pl. *vikiy nto'i Fon's wives*), *wan wiyy nto'*, which means that all sons born to the *Fon*, whether before or after his accession to the fonship, can succeed to the throne, *ceteris paribus*. They argue that children born to the same person belong together in the same household. True, they belong together in the same household. But we are not dealing with an ordinary household. This seems to us to be a recent rationalization by princes and princesses.

Whatever the case, it is only when a candidate has satisfied all these four conditions, and all four must be underlined, and has been chosen by the succession council, that he can normally be installed the *Fon* of *Nso'*.

Our informants were also not agreed as to the site and procedure of the installation. According to some, the installation takes place at the

Ndzeendzev compound, Ndzeendzev for short. When the choice has been made, they say, a *nshiyilav*, taking along with him a *ngwerong* disguise, a tunic attached to a hood, known simply as *ngwerong*, is detailed to fetch and lure the candidate to the nearest taanto's compound, from where he is taken in the *ngwerong* to Maamo, the leader-compound of the ataanto', and from there to Ndzeendzev where he is installed. After the installation, he is led in a procession as *Fon*, no longer concealed in the *ngwerong*, to Taangkum, the second most important compound of the *vibay*, from where he is conducted, in the same procession now led by Shuufaay Taangkum, to *ngwerong's* section of the palace, and from there, through the inner channels, to the *mbiv faay*, the *Fon's* section of the palace or the *nto'* proper. According to the others, the installation takes place in the *nto'* proper. As soon as the candidate is chosen, they say, a *nshiyilav*, taking along with him a *ngwerong* is detailed to fetch and lure him to the nearest taanto's compound, and from there he is led to Maamo in the *ngwerong*, from where he is conducted in the same manner to Ndzeendzev. After Shuufaay Ndzeendzev has seen, welcomed and congratulated him, he is conducted in the *ngwerong*, to Taangkum through *ngwerong la'*. From Taangkum, he is escorted to *ngwerong la'*, where he removes the *ngwerong* disguise, and is then led to the *nto'* proper for installation by Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, *taawong*, and *yeewong*, who have already been waiting there for that purpose.

There is also no agreement as to the installation site of some of the most recent *afon*. There is no disagreement over the installation site of Ngga' Bi'fon II, who was installed in 1972, and that of Ngga' Bi'fon III, who acceded to the throne in 1983, which was Ndzeendzev, although many described it as a recent anomaly. Most informants we questioned said that Sembum III who acceded to the throne in 1947 was installed in the *nto'* proper, although a few thought this circumstantial; yet the *taawong* officiating in 1947 gave Kaberry an account of Sembum III's installation at Ndzeendev. There was also serious disagreement over the installation site of Sembum II, who is thought to have succeeded in the early 1880's, of Mapiri, who became Fon in 1907 and of Nga' Bifon I who succeeded in 1910, some informants saying it was at Ndzeendev and others that it was in the *nto'* proper. In 1945 Kaberry collected accounts from surviving eyewitnesses of Nga Bifon I's installation, including the then officiating *yeewong*: all described it as taking place at Ndzeendev.

During our investigations, it became clear that the information concerning the site and procedure for the installation of the *Fon* was coloured at almost every turn by a long political and constitutional dispute centred on the position of Ndzeendzev in Nso' society. The account of it we

give below relies insofar as possible on eyewitness accounts, and has many points in common with the procedure we ourselves observed in 1983.

When the candidate has been finally chosen, Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, *taawong*, *yeewong*, and the *ataanto' vee saamba* are charged with the preparation of the installation site. They assemble together, in one hall at Ndzeendzev, the installation paraphernalia from the *nto'* proper, from *ngwerong la'*, and from Ndzeendzev. These include: a state pumpkin bowl, *kighin ke wong*, containing *kiwooy*; a special enthroning stool, *kava'*; a wreath of *Basella alba*, *ror*; medicated palm oil, *yo'*; a sacred, state long-necked gourd, *sho' wong*, containing palm wine; a special *tan ngwerong*, a cap embroidered with a pattern representing cowries, *tan mban* or *ku'*; *kilanglang*; a belt of otter skin, *juv sengi* the royal drinking cup, *bom*; the royal walking stick, *kitoom*; the royal bracelet, *keisa'*; and the "*ngwerong* walking stick *mbang ngwerong*, which is taken to Maamo.

At the same time, a *nshiyilav*, taking along with him a *ngwerong* disguise, is detailed to fetch and lure the candidate to the nearest *taanto's* compounds. There, the *nshiyilav* throws the disguise on the ground in front of the candidate and then requests him to pick it up and wear it. That done, the *nshiyilav* escorts him in this disguise and hands him over to the *ataanto'* at Maamo. The *ataanto'* then give this special *ngwerong* person the *mbang ngwerong* to use as they conduct him from Maamo to Ndzeendzev for installation by *taawong*, *yeewong*, and Shuufaay Ndzeendzev--the three officiants charged with the installation of the *Fon* of Nso,6.

The installation is initiated by the entry of the disguised prince into the installation hall with *taawong*, *yeewong*, and Shuufaay Ndzeendzev. First, the *yeewong* takes the *mbang ngwerong* from his hand and leans it against the wall and then requests him to take off the *ngwerong* disguise. The *yeewong* then puts the *kighin* or *kiwooy* in front of him and asks him to stoop over it with his feet close together. That done, the *yeewong* takes out the *kiwooy* from the *kighin ke wong* and passes it over his feet three times in order to cleanse him from any impurities. After that, the *juv seng*, the *kilanglang* and the *tan mban* are placed on the ground in front of him and he is requested to wear them. He then ties the *juv seng* round his waist, in a standing position, and is helped by Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, *taawong*, and *yeewong* in clothing himself with the *kilanglang* which is passed between the legs and made to fall in folds over the *juv seng*. Then the *yeewong* takes up the *ror* and rubs it lightly with the *yo'* as she utters some invocation in which she implores the Nso' royal ancestors, gods and earth to accept the candidate, whose name she pronounces for the last time as long as he is alive, as the father of the nation and to help him in his new functions. Thereafter, she puts the *ror* on the candidate's neck, in order to connect him with the Nso' royal ancestors and earth, a connection she reinforces by

rubbing the candidate with the *yo'* which endues the candidate's body with kingly power and makes it sacrosanct. The candidate is then made to wear the *keisa'*, a royal insignium, on his left wrist. Finally, he fits the *tan mban* on his head and is requested to sit on the *aava'* to complete the installation. The candidate is now in possession of the powers and authority of the *Fon* of Nso', the powers and authority that are also held by his predecessors as ancestral *afon* of Nso'.

What follows immediately is the "Act of Homage", in which the three installers and those present at the installation indicate their subordination and loyalty to the new *Fon*, by greeting him in the traditional manner, *bun fon*. Shuufaay Ndzeendzev takes the lead in doing this. He stoops slightly before the *Fon*, claps his half-cupped hands two or three times, takes them to his mouth and calls the *Fon's* attention by pronouncing the etiquette word "nsoon", after which he informs the *Fon* that his eponym, *mengkjem*, is Shaang by saying, "dže a *Shaang*", it is Shaang⁷. After that, the *Fon* calls him Shaang, as a mark of his fonship and authority over Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, who answers "nyar", in acknowledgement of that fact. Then *taawong* and *yeewong* go through the same process in this order, with the only exception that the eponym used for both of them is *nggwaang*, which means Assistant. Thereafter, the *ataanto'* and, in the case of 1983, the *atar ngwerong*, who escorted the *Fon* to Ndzeendzev for installation, are invited to *bun fon* en masse without as yet bothering him with their eponyms. Then either Faay Faanjang or Faay Tsenkay (who are the only two *ataanto'* who normally can serve the *Fon* wine) is called upon to give the *Fon* the royal cup, *bom*, and serve him wine from the *sho' wong*. Then the *Fon* serves the three installers with the rest of the wine, beginning with Shuufaay Ndzeendzev. After the little feast, a *taanto'* hands over the *kitoom* to the *Fon* in readiness for the short journey from Ndzeendzev to Taangkum and the *nto'*.

The journey from Ndzeendzev to Taangkum and the *nto'* takes the form of a single-file procession. The *Fon* is led by Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, *taawong* and *yeewong*, accompanied by the *ataanto'* and, in the case of 1983, *atar ngwerong*. The procession passes by the homestead of Maamo, the most senior *taanto'*, through the *maandže nggay*, to Taangkum where Shuufaay Taangkum pays his homage to the *Fon* in the usual manner and the *Fon* asserts his authority over him by calling his eponym. After that, Shuufaay Taangkum offers the *Fon* a calabash of palm wine which he and his entourage drink. After this palm wine feast, Shuufaay Taangkum leads the *Fon* and his group in a procession to *ngwerong la'*, through the *maandže nggay*. Before the procession from Taangkum reaches *koko*, the main entrance to *ngwerong la'*, the *taawong* and *yeewong*, who cannot enter the *ngwerong* precinct, leave and

make for the *nto'* proper, while the rest proceed to *ngwerong la'*. There, the *Fon* is first introduced to the lesser *ngwerong*, *ngwerong wo teri*, and then to the greater and night *ngwerong*, *ngwerong vitse's*, where he now wears the *mbor*, an emolient leaf, on his forehead, held in position by the *ku'* (a special *ngwerong* cap), and puts two porcupine erectile bristles under the *mbor*, all this as a sign of greater nobility, *vice'*. (In 1983, the *Fon* was led from Ndzeendzev straight to *ngwerong la'* on the insistence of Shuufaay Ndzeendzev who said he does not go to Taangkum. After the usual rituals had been performed at *ngwerong la'*, he was led from there to Taangkum, without Shuufaay Ndzeendzev in the group. At Taangkum, Shuufaay Taangkum did what was required of him, but stayed behind as the group returned to the *nto'* because his normal function of introducing the *Fon* to *ngwerong* had been performed by someone else, Shuufaay Ndzeendzev). Thereafter, Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, Shuufaay Taangkum and the *ataanto'* escort the *Fon*, through the inner channels, to *taakibu'*, where important dignitaries, such as *vibay* and *won nto'*, are already waiting to pay homage to the new *Fon*, after he has sat on the throne for the first time at *taakibu'*. From there, the *Fon* is taken to the house-of-the-country, *lav wong*, where he is anointed with the oil-of-the-country, *menggver me wong*, and introduced to the things-of-the-country", *vifa ve wong*. From *lav wong*, the *Fon* goes to relax in the resting court, *kiresi* or *faay kiresi*, while Shuufaay Ndzeendzev goes to inform the dignitaries at *taakibu'* and the crowd in the *maandze nggay* that the *Fon* will be introduced to the general public the next day. (In 1983, after Shuufaay Ndzeendzev had made the general public aware of the time the *Fon* was to be introduced officially to them, and the *Fon* had relaxed at the *kiresi* for quite some time, Sheey Taanjong, also known as Sheey Mbve', the oldest living *tav nggiri*, came to the *kiresi* and reminded the *Fon* that he had not yet come to *nggiri la'*, the *nggiri* precinct. It was then that the *Fon* went to *nggiri la'*, in the company of the *vi bay*, Faay Faanjang and princes who were already feasting on beer and palm wine at *taakibu'*). During the night, the *Fon* sleeps with one of the *vikiy nto'* to consummate the installation and 'soften the compound."

In introducing the *Fon* to the general public the next day, he is accompanied by the nobles and led to the *maandze nggay* by Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, taawong, and *jeewong*, in a procession that merges with that of *jeengwerong*, the day masker "mother-of-ngwerong." The two groups, now turned one are conducted in a *kigha'* dance, a special dance, three times round the *maandze nggay*, anti-clock wise, by the *jeengwerong*, as the *jeewong* asperges the dancing populace, to which the *Fon* is thus introduced, with the *kinwooy*. When the dance stops, the *Fon* stands by the special passage leading from the *maandze nggay* to the *taakibu'* and receives the collective homage of those

among the populace qualified to greet him in the traditional manner. The Fon then addresses the populace, indicating his policies and priorities, before retiring to the inner section of the nto' proper to prepare for the selection and installation of his *taawong*, *yeewong* and *yeefon*.

TaaW'ong

The *taawong* is connected to the Nso' royal ancestors and earth in the same way as the *Fon* is connected to them during installation. Thus, his person becomes sacrosanct (or inviolable) and his office is considered as sacred as that of the *Fon*. Although usually regarded as the high priest, he is in reality the deputy high priest. The duty to appeal to God or to the Nso' royal ancestors, earth and gods, on behalf of the nation, through the offering of sacrifices, falls squarely on the *Fon*. Only when the *Fon* is not available to do so, for whatever reasons, does the *taawong* perform the sacrifice. It is in this sense that we regard him as the deputy high priest.

Apart from performing sacrifices in the absence of the *Fon*, *taawong* performs a number of ritual duties on behalf of the Nso' nation. He must be physically present and playing a role during all state rituals and sacrifices. He leads all processions to and from ritual sites during which he plays the *nggem wong* at intervals. At the beginning and end of each sacrifice, he plays the *nggem wong*.

Perhaps most of his duties are performed when he survives the death of the *Fon* to whom he was the *taawong*. Then, he schools the new *Fon*, *taawong* and *yeewong* on the order and detailed procedures of royal rituals and sacrifices. He assists the new *Fon* in the selection of the new *taawong* and *yeewong*. He assists the old *yeewong* in the installation of the new *taawong* and *yeewong*, and thus plays a role in linking them to the Nso' royal ancestors, earth and gods. He also assists the old *yeewong* in the installation and connection of the new *Fon* to the Nso' royal ancestors, earth and gods. He assists the *yeewong* in the installation of Shuufaay Ndzeendzev. He must accompany the new *Fon* in the procession that introduces him to the Nso' populace for the first time. When the corpse of the *Fon* is placed in the *faay kibve* before burial, the *taawong* plays the *nggem wong* round it at frequent intervals. And, he pronounces the last invocation before the *Fon* is buried and performs the first sacrifice to the most recent ancestral *Fon* of Nso'.

The person who performs such important ritual functions in the society must be carefully selected. The right to select the new *taawong* rests with the new *Fon* whose *taawong* he will be. However, in some cases, the new *Fon* simply indicates what kind of person he would want for his *taawong* and then

leaves the choice to the old *taawong* and *yeewong*. For example, in 1983, the present *Fon*, Ngga' Bi'fon III, said simply that his *taawong* and *yeewong* must be Sembum III's children and then left the choice in the hands of the old *taawong* and *yeewong*. Thus, he bypassed the children of his immediate predecessor. In other cases, the new *Fon* leaves the choice entirely in the hands of the old *taawong* and *yeewong*. That was the case with Ngga' Bi'fon II in 1972. In the last two cases, the old *taawong* and *yeewong* usually consult older princes and princesses, who might be influenced by some nobles and dignitaries who stand to benefit from the choice.

The choice is made however under certain conditions and considerations. Like the *Fon*, the candidate must be of a *mtaar* mother, in order to make it possible for him to be acceptable and linked to the Nso' earth. Also, like the *Fon*, the candidate must be a prince of the 'leopard skin', some say the son of a *Fon*, a condition which makes it possible for him to be accepted and linked to the Nso' royal ancestors. In order to ensure continuity, sons of the most recently deceased *Fon* are preferred. Likewise, persons younger than the *Fon* to whom they will be *taawong* are usually preferred because it is expected that they will survive the *Fon*'s death and act as mentors to the new officiants.

To choose the candidate for the post of *taawong* is one thing.

But to make him accept that position is quite another. It is not unusual in Nso' for a person to turn down an offer of an important office. Sometimes, a candidate for an office is compelled by dint of physical force to accept it. Such is often the case with *ataala'* or lineage heads. It is certainly, the case with *ataw ngwerong* and *ataw nggiri*, titled leaders of *nggiri*, the society of princes and *dny*. But it is usually never the case with the *taawong*, because it is feared that if a *taawong* were forced into office, he would bring down curses rather than blessings on the nation. This he can do by constantly offending the ancestors or by invoking them to retaliate on his behalf.

Thus, in recent cases, the emphasis in the attempt to make the selected candidate take the office of *taawong* is on persuasion. Once the candidate has been decided upon, the old *taawong* and *yeewong*, whoever has a better relationship with him, is detailed to approach him and broach the news to him, while the other assembles the installation paraphernalia and prepares the installation site. If the candidate shows any signs of reluctance or is hesitant, it is the task of the *taawong* or *yeewong*, who is with him to persuade him. In many such cases, a piece of land, landed property, a homestead, future wives, or any combination of these are the items used to induce him to accept the office. Recently an offer of good western education was added to the list. This was the case with F.W. Mbinglo who became the *taawong* of Ngga' Bi'fon II in 1972 but resigned from the post two hours after his installation

because, as he put it to us, he did not feel that the life of a *taawong* was a suitable life for him.⁹ If the attempt to persuade him fails, or if he accepts the post but later turns it down, a new candidate is chosen and the process of getting him to accept the post of his own volition is repeated, until a willing candidate is found. Since it has never been the case that no willing candidate was ever found, we cannot say what would happen if the situation arose.

As we said earlier, while the old *taawong* or *yeewong* is attempting to get the candidate to accept the office, the other assembles the installation paraphernalia and prepares the installation site. The installation takes place in the innermost section of the *nto'* proper, in the environs of the *Fon's* bed chamber. In 1972, F.W. Mbinglo was installed in the *faay ndzey*, the great house of the royal protective medicine and, in 1983, the present *taawong* was installed in the *faay vikiy nto'*, an open area behind the *faay kishiiy* used as a waiting room by the *vikiy nto'* who want to have audience with the *Fon*. There are also some indications that earlier *ataawong* were installed in the *lav wong*. Thus, it is in the *faay ndzey*, *faay vikiy nto'*, *lav wong* or elsewhere in the same area that the old *taawong* or *yeewong* sets up the installation items. These include *sho' wong* containing sacred palm wine, *nggin*, containing palm wine, *kighin ke wong* containing *kiwooy*, a state pumpkin cup or *bar wong, yo'*, and *ror*. Once these items are assembled and the candidate accepts the offer, the installation of the new *taawong* begins.

The old *taawong* or *yeewong* who convinced the candidate that he should accept the offer conducts him to the installation site. There, he is first made to undress down to his pants. *yeewong*, who is on his left, takes out the *kiwooy* from the *kighin ke wong* and passes it three times over his feet and round his head and neck, in order to cleanse him of all pollution. After that, he is instructed to sit on a stone or piece of wood at a suitable place in the installation site while the old *taawong* goes to collect the last installation item from the *Fon*. This is a new *ndzey njav*, another royal cloth.

When the old *taawong* returns with the new *ndzey njav*, the main installation ceremony begins. He throws the *ndzey njav* on the ground, in front of the candidate, and then requests him to pick it up and wear it. When he picks it up, he is then helped by the old *taawong* and *yeewong* to wear it in the same manner as the *Fon* did during his installation. After that, he is invited to come before the installation paraphernalia and instructed to stand directly in front of the *sho' wong*. Then the *yeewong* takes up the *ror*, which must be the left-overs of the *ror* used on the new *Fon* at installation, and rubs it with the *yo'*, which also must be the left-overs of the *yo'* used on the new *Fon* at installation, while uttering some invocation. During the invocation, she implores the Nso' royal ancestors and earth and, through them, the gods to

accept the candidate, whose name she pronounces for the last time as long as he is alive, as an intermediary between them and the Nso' nation and to lend him their ears. After the invocation, she puts the *ror* on his neck and thus connects him to Nso' royal ancestors and earth. Then she rubs him with the *yo'* in order to make his body sacrosanct. The three of them now drink the sacred wine from the *sho' wong* to complete the main installation ceremony of the new *taawong*. Indeed, at that juncture, he is fully the new *taawong*. The authority of a *taawong* has been handed over to him, although he remains under the mentorship of the old *taawong* who guides and instructs him in his new functions.

The drinking of the sacred wine itself has its own special protocol and procedure. It is the old *yeewong* who begins the drinking. First, she stoops in front of the *kighin ke wong* with her feet close together. Then she takes out the *kinwooy* from the *kighin ke wong* and uses it to cleanse herself by passing it over her feet three times. That done, she picks up the *bar wong* and is served the sacred wine from the *sho' wong* by the old *taawong*. Then she puts the *bar wong* on the ground. Now comes the turn of the old *taawong* who follows the same procedure as the old *yeewong*, with the exception that he is served the sacred wine by the old *yeewong*. The last person to drink the sacred wine is the new *taawong*, who picks up the *bar wong* from the ground and is served the wine by the *yeewong* without going through another purification rite.

When this sacred wine ceremony ends the main installation ritual, the old *taawong* and *yeewong* and the new *taawong* move to the *faay vikiy nto'*, if the installation did not take place there, bringing along with them the ordinary palm wine in the *nggiv*. There, they relax while drinking the palm wine and chatting, the purpose being to distract the attention of the new *taawong* from the installation ordeal he has just undergone and from the taxing, awesome duties that lie ahead of him. As they drink, the news of the installation circulates among the populace. After they have had enough to drink, the old *taawong* and *yeewong* take the new *taawong* to the *Fon* to greet him officially in the traditional way, without the usual gifts that go with the first salutation of the *Fon*, *kimbunfon*. In that way, he recognizes the *Fon's* authority over him and subordinates himself to the *Fon*, who accepts that homage and asserts his authority over the new *taawong* by calling him *nggwaang*. After that, the *Fon* offers him a drink of palm wine, commends and encourages him in his new functions. He is then shown where to sit whenever he comes to the palace, after which he is at liberty to leave and make way for the installation of the new *yeewong*, which may come a day or even several days after.

Yeewong

The *yeewong* is connected to the Nso' royal ancestors and earth in the same way as the *Fon* and the *taawong* are during installation. Like them, her person is sacrosanct and, like the *taawong*, she is a *nggwaang* to the *Fon*.

However, because she is female, her functions differ in some ways from those of her male counterpart, *taawong*. She cannot sacrifice in lieu of the *Fon* as *taawong* does. Specifically, she cannot slaughter the sacrificial beast, although she may contribute to the invocation that goes with it. She assists during sacrifices in bringing along the ritual instruments to the site and handing them over to the *Fon* or the *taawong* performing the sacrifice at appropriate times, and in taking them back to the *lav wong* after the sacrifice. These instruments include *bii* or camwood, *kibam ke wong* or bag-of-the-country, *sho' wong*, *kisoo ke wong* or hoe-of-the-country, and *kiban ke cu* or sacrificial corn or millet porridge.

Like the *taawong*, the *yeewong* also has other ritual functions.

When required to do so, she assists in the selection of the new *taawong* and *yeewong*. She plays the leading role in the installation of a new *taawong* and *yeewong*, which links them with the Nso' royal ancestors and earth. She also plays the leading role in the installation of the new *Fon* and Shuufaay Ndzeendzev. Thus, the most important ritual and political installations in Nso' revolve around the *yeewong*, with the able assistance of the *taawong*. She cleanses the dancing population from pollution with the *kiwooy* when the new *Fon* is being introduced to the public for the first time. She plays the leading role in preparing the corpse of the *Fon* for burial. And, she officially announces the death of the *Fon* to the royal family by wailing in the *nggay* of the palace.

Every other thing about the *yeewong* that concerns our subject is, to a large extent, similar to that of the *taawong*. Her selection and installation protocol and procedure are the same as those of the *taawong*. For the same reasons as the *taawong*, she must be of a *mtaar* mother and a princess of the "leopard skin", although some say simply that she must be a daughter of a *Fon*. Preferably, she should be younger than the *Fon* to whom she is *yeewong* and should be the daughter of the most recently deceased *Fon*, for the same reasons as for the *taawong*. She cannot be forced to take office. The major difference between her and the *taawong* is that she does not greet the *Fon* officially and traditionally immediately after installation as the *taawong* does. This is the rite she accomplishes in future after her marriage, as does the *yeefon*.

Yeefon

The situation of *yeefon* is radically different from that of the *Fon*, *taawong* and *yeewong*. Although *yeefon*'s advice may be sought on pressing issues by important persons like the *Fon* and his councillors, she does not have any state ritual or administrative duties. Her position is honorary, intended to honour and show respect for the real or representative mother of the new *Fon* and to provide her with the wherewithal for her livelihood and make life easy for her.

The choice of the *yeefon* is a simple matter. If the real mother of the new *Fon* is alive, which is seldom the case, the position goes to her automatically. If she has died, as is usually the case, one of the real, rather than classificatory daughters of the new *Fon*, preferably a younger one, becomes the *yeefon*. If the new *Fon* has no daughters, the position goes to his real sister, that is, his full sibling. If he has no full sibling, the office is assumed by a representative sister, that is, one who belongs to the same "house" as he does in the palace¹⁰. As the search for *yeefon* has never gone beyond this, we cannot say what would happen if the situation arose. However, the Nso' have a penchant for breaking the rules and papering over the cracks.

When the candidate has been chosen, the *Fon* summons the team of her installers to the innermost courtyard, where is situated the *fuay kishiiy*, to inform them about the choice. These include the old *yeefon*, who must be present, the positional successors to former *ayeefon* or *afenggay*, the seven *ataa nto*', and the *ataw ngwerong*, not all of whom need be present. As the *Fon* sends for the candidate, one of the installers takes the installation paraphernalia, which denotes royalty, nobility or high social status, to the *nggay*. These include a solid brass or copper necklace, *kwang*, a royal bracelet, *kisa*', a royal bandolier of thick cloth embroidered with beads that cover the whole surface of the cloth, *way*, a throne or *kava*', and a new royal cloth, *ndzey njav*.

As soon as the candidate arrives, the installers leave for the *nggay*, leaving behind only one *tav ngwerong*, the *Fon*, and the candidate. On arrival at the *nggay*, two of the male installers stay in the courtyard of the *nggay* while the rest enter it and take their seats. A short while later, the *Fon* asks the candidate to accompany the remaining *tav ngwerong* to where she will be informed about the purpose of her summons. The *tav ngwerong* then lures the unsuspecting candidate towards the *nggay*. On arrival in the courtyard of the *nggay*, the *tav ngwerong* takes hold of the candidate and is helped by the other two installers in forcing her into the *nggay*. Even if she does not like the job, she is compelled to take it. Thus, the least demanding post, with the most

lucrative remuneration is, paradoxically, the only one among the four which is forced on someone.

Once in the *nggay*, the candidate is undressed down to the pants, with each installer retaining whatever he or she removed from her body. In this same nude state, the old *yeefon* clothes her with the new *ndzey njav*. Then, the *kwang* is worn on her neck, the *kisa* round her wrist, and the *wav*, resting on her right shoulder, across her body by anyone or more of her installers. After that, the old *yeefon* seats her on the *kava*. From that moment, she is fully and effectively the new *yeefon* with all her rights and privileges.

As soon as she is seated on the *kava*, the installers are served with drinks, after which the *ataanto* and the *ataw ngwerong* leave the scene. Then, the princesses are invited in to hail their new *yeefon* and give her their first homage. After that, the old *yeefon*, the new *yeefon*, the *afenggay*, and the princesses queue up in this order and go to the house to which the new *yeefon* belongs in the palace. On arrival in the house, they surrender the new *yeefon* to the *vikij nto* and withdraw from the scene.

Immediately after that, the *vikij nto* bathe her in warm water and rub camwood on her, activities they have to perform every morning for a week. She is then introduced to two *vikij nto*, who must not be from the "house" to which she belongs for undisclosed reasons, who are to take care of her problems henceforth, and who must be the first to be apprised of those problems. They are also in charge of preparing water every morning for the bathing of the *yeefon* for a week. But, the actual bathing is done by the first *wiyi nto* who makes the water ready. After this week, the *yeefon* begins to bathe herself. But she continues to stay in the palace in this house until she is given in marriage.

Her social status is very high. She ranks fourth to the *Fon*, Shuufaay Ndzeendzev, and Shuufaay Taangkum in palace protocol. Apart from the *Fon*, she is the only person in Nso whose seat and bed are both referred to as *kava*, meaning throne. If she is the real mother of the *Fon*, she cannot remarry. If she is a representative mother of the *Fon*, she may not marry: in the former case, her husband will receive honours, *ambu'me*, and her house, which is privileged to have two doors on separate walls, will be separated from those of her husband's other wives and secluded behind her husband's bed chamber; in the latter case, no stigma would attach to her in society. She is usually provided with the use of farmland for herself, as well as, nowadays, registered land and property in sylvan wealth normally reserved to men by the *Fon*. In the past, she was provided with slaves.

Conclusion

Although the transfer of power and authority in *nto'* nso' involves the *Fon*, *taawong*, *yeewong* and *yeefon*, it is the death of the *Fon* alone that occasions the whole process, perhaps because the *Fon* is the only person amongst them who retains his power and authority even at death while the same prerogatives are transferred to his successor at installation. Thus, during burial, everything is done to emphasize the idea that the dead *Fon* is alive in the symbolic palace in the grave, from where he communicates with his successor, with all his royalty, power and authority.

While there was no agreement about the composition of the so-called succession council, it appears that membership of the council has varied with time and circumstances, and that the *vibay vee saamba*, *taawong*, *yeewong* and *ngwerong* representatives have always been members of the group. The candidate selected, however, must fulfil four conditions, one of which has been challenged recently, despite supporting precedents, mainly by members of the dynastic lineage. There was also no agreement as to whether the selected candidate is installed in the *nto'* proper or at Ndzeendzev; there are explanatory anecdotes and traditions to support both variants, and to suggest that the Ndzeendzev site might have been subsequent to the *nto'* one.

Whatever the case, it is during the installation process that power and authority are actually transferred from the old team of leaders to the new. During the installations, the old *yeewong* links the new *Fon*, *taawong* and *yeewong* to the Nso' royal ancestors, gods and earth, and makes their persons sacrosanct and offices sacred, all of which constitute the essence of the whole exercise. However, unlike the *yeewong* who cannot, the *taawong* can sacrifice to the Nso' royal ancestors, gods and earth on behalf of the nation in the absence of the *Fon*. Yet, the most important ritual and political installations in Nso' revolve around the *yeewong*. On the other hand, the *yeefon*, whose position is honorary, has no ritual or administrative duties, although she ranks very high in palace protocol.

This study has left out those rituals and sacrifices which are directly connected with the transfer of power and authority in *nto'* Nso', but which come at a much later date, after the actual transfer of power and authority has taken place. These include the *nggven* or the ritual cleansing of the land and its people from the pollution caused by the *Fon's* death, the *ncumelu'* in which the *Fon* visits his mother's family and makes gifts to them, the *kitaayiy* in which the new *taawong*, *yeewong* and *yeefon* individually also visit their mothers' families and make gifts to them, and the *cu* in which the *Fon* makes

sacrifices at all ritual sites in Nso' for the first time. We have also simply provided an ethnographic description of the transfer of power and authority in *nto'* Nso' and have left its symbolic analysis to others.

Endnotes

1. We have been in correspondence with Mrs. E.M. Chilver about P.M. Kaberry's fieldnotes and have also had from her a commentary on Paul N. Mzeka's description (in his *The Core Culture of Nso'*) which we have found very useful.

2. During the German and early British period, incongruous tasks, such as the collection of head tax, recruitment of labour and reporting to a higher authority, were laid upon the *Fon* which led to constitutional adjustments, in the direction of the secularization of the monarchy, which still persist.

3. *Bom* is also the *Fon's* wine, calabash of wine, or calabash of water.

4. We have a text of the invocation, collected by P.M. Kaberry, which amply confirms the role of the dead *Fon* as the promoter of fertility and the averter of noxious influences.

5. In 1983, prince Lawrence Fanka, the candidate, was fetched from the Kimbo' Catholic Cathedral by a *nshiyilav*, Saidu nggong, and lured to Faanjang, where he was made to wear the *ngwerong* disguise by Faay Faanjang. As soon as they arrived Faanjang, Saidu nggong handed him over to Faay Faanjang and then left the scene.

6. The 1983 situation differed greatly from this situation. After the candidate wore the *ngwerong* disguise at Faanjang, Faay Faanjang gave him the *mbang ngwerong*, which is usually given at Maamo, to use and then conducted this special *ngwerong* person to Maamo where the other *ataanto'* and the *ataw ngwerong* were already waiting for the candidate. Furthermore, the *ataw ngwerong* accompanied the *ataanto'* in escorting the special *ngwerong* person from Maamo to Ndzeendzev for installation, a task previously performed only by the *ataanto'*.

7. Every *faay* (lord) or *shuufaay* (great lord) in Nso' has an eponym by which the *Fon* refers to him since any person who assumes that position cannot be referred to by his birth-name, except during his burial and thereafter.

8. *ngwerong wo teri* or lesser *ngwerong* represents the musical or 'standing' *ngwerong* within the membership of general *ngwerong*; *ngwerong vitse* or the night *ngwerong* represents the core of *ngwerong*, as a cult of seers and its sacra.

9. This explanation should be understood in the light of the fact that he was already under the influence of Western ideas, having spent several years in the secondary school.

11. The women section of the palace, *nsan*, is divided into five "houses" or *lav si* for economic, social and administrative functions. Each *wan nto* must belong to one of these "houses". The children of each "house" regard themselves as full brothers and sisters and the consanguineous feeling amongst them is a strong one.

Glossary

afon (sing. *fon*): kings

akava' (sing. *kava*): thrones

amfoome (sing. *mfoome*): war commanders

ataala' (sing. *taala*): lineage heads

ataala' mtaar: free commoner lineage heads

ataanto' (sing. *taanto*): lineage heads who are also palace stewards

ataanto' vee saamba: the seven leading retainer lineage heads who are also palace stewards

ataawong (sing. *taawong*): fathers- or elders-of-the-country; state deputy high priests

ataw nggiri (sing. *taw nggiri*): titled leaders of *nggiri*

ataw ngwerong (sing. *taw ngwerong*): titled leaders of *ngwerong ayee fon* (sing. *yee fon*): queen mothers-of-the-afon

ayeenwong (sing. *yee wong*): noble-mothers-of-the-country; state deputy high priestesses

bar wong: state cup

bii: camwood

bom (pl. *bom si*): fon's cup, calabash of wine and wine itself

bun fon: ordinary salutation of *fon*

cu: sacrifice

duy: cadet royal

Faanjang: compound of *Faanjang*, also lineage of the second most senior *taanto*'

faay: any house in the palace proper, and the residence of lineage head; also lord

faay kibve: royal mortuary *faay kishiiy*: fon's bed chamber

faay ndzey: house of the royal protective medicine

faay vikiy nto': an open court used by fon's wives wishing to have audience with the *fon*

fem (pl. *fem si*): royal grave-yard; hut over the *fon*'s grave

fon (pl. *afon*): king

fondom: kingdom

juv baa: leopard skin *juv seng*: otter pelt

kava' (pl. *akava'*): throne; *fon's* bed; *yeenwong's* seat and bed

kibam ke wong: bag-of-the-country; state bag *kibay* (pl. *vibay*); also *shunfaay*: great lord *kigha'*: special dance

kighin ke wong: bowl-of-the-country; state bowl *kilanglang*: royal cloth

kiman: broad forest leaf

kimbunfon: official salutation of *fon*, usually accompanied by gifts of wood, drinks, fowls and goats

kingka: invocation, prayer *kiresi*: resting court

kirum: strong tree resistant to destruction by ants or bacteria

kisa': royal or noble bracelet

kisoo ke wong: hoe-of-the-country; state hoe

kitaayiy: a maiden visit, accompanied by gifts, of a newly installed title holder to his mother's family

kitooome (pl. *vitooome*): royal or noble walking stick

kiwooy: slimy concocted liquid for removing pollution and for blessing by asperging with a whisk

koonte: a tree creeper resembling *Passiflora* *kwang*: solid brass or copper necklace

ku': special *ngwerong* cap

lav (pl. *lav si*): house

lav si (sing. *lav*): houses; grouping of *fon's* wives into palace families

lav wong: house-of-the-country; state house

Maamo: compound of Maamo; also lineage of first or most senior taanto'

maandze nggay: forecourt in the palace

mban: well decorated local wall mat

mbiv faay: *fon*'s own section of the palace; *nto*' proper

mbor: emollient leaf

mbu'me (pl. *ambu'me*): honours

menggver me wong: oil-of-the-country; state oil

mengkejem: eponym

mtaar: free commoners, one of four ranked status categories

ncumelu': *Fon*'s maiden visit, accompanied by gifts, to his mother's family

Ndzeendev: compound/lineage of most senior great lord

ndzey njav: royal cloth

nsan: women's section of the palace

nshiyilav (pl. *nsheelav*): retainers or *ngwerong*'s pages *nshiy lav faay* (pl. *nsheelav se faay*): *fon*'s personal page

nsii: music played during burial of heroes, brave men, and aged persons

Nso' mtaar: free commoners; original inhabitants of Nso' land

nsoon: word pronounced when calling *fon*'s attention

nggay: family assembly hall; ceremonial hall *nggem wong*: state gong

nggiri: society of princes and cadet royals *nggin*: long-neck gourd or pourer

nggven: the ritual cleansing of the land and its people of all pollution

nggwaang: assistant; deputy; eponym of *taawong* and *yeewong*

ngwerong: regulatory society; disguised member of regulatory society wearing a face-covered hooded tunic; *ataanto'* and *ataw ngwerong*

ngwerong la': *ngwerong's* precinct in the palace; *ngwerong's* compound

ngwerong vitse': *ngwerong-of-the-night*; greater *ngwerong ngwerong wo teri*: lesser *ngwerong*

ror: wreath of *Basella alba*

sho' wong: state long-neck gourd or ladle

shuufaay: great lord

Shuufaay Ndzeendzev: most senior great lord *taakibu'*: audience court

taanto' (pl. *ataanto'*): palace steward who is also retainer lineage head

taanwong: state deputy high priest; father-of-the-country *tan mban*: special *ngwerong* cap

tan ngwerong: *ngwerong* cap

tav nggiri: (pl. *ataw nggiri*): titled leader of *nggiri tav ngwerong*: titled leader of *ngwerong*

vibay (sing. *kibay*): great lords

vibay ve duy: great cadet royal lords

vibay ve kpu: great lords of death

vi bay ve ntangri: great lords of sacrifice

vibay ve Nso': great commoner lords (three in number)

vibay vee saamba: seven great lords who are also members of *fon's* council
wan nto' (pl. *won nto'*): prince, princess

wan wiyy nto': child of *fon's* wife

wiiy nto' (pl. *vikiy nto'*): *fon's wife*

won nto' (sing. *wan nto'*): *princes, princesses*

won won nto' (sing. *wan wan nto'*): *children of princes and princesses*

yeengwerong: *day masker of mother-of-ngwerong; greater ngwerong or ngwerong of the night*

yeewong: *state deputy high priestess; queen-mother-of-the-country*

yo': *medicated palm oil for installation of fon, taawong and yeewong*

References

Published Sources

Chem-Langghee, B.; Fanso, Verkijika G.; and Chilver, E.M. "Nto' Nso' and its occupants: Privileged Access and Internal organisation in the Old and New Palaces." *Paideuma*, 31, 1985: 151-181.

Chilver, E.M.; and Kaberry, P.M. *Traditional Bamenda: The Precolonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*, Volume I. Ministry of Primary Education and Social Welfare and West Cameroon Antiquities Commission, Buea, 1967.

Kaberry, Phyllis M. "Traditional Politics in Nsaw." *Africa*, XXIX: 4 (October 1959):366-83.

Mzeka, Paul N. *The Core Culture of Nso*. Jerome Radin Co., Agawam, 1980.

Unpublished Sources

Bridges, W.M. Bansa Re-assessment Report, (T.S.). Buea Archives and Rhodes House Library, Oxford (MSS Africana), 1934.

Chilver, E.M. "The Burial and Installation of the Afon of Nso': The Sequence as Set out in Paul N. Mzeka's *The Core Culture of Nso*', with Notes and Comments Derived from M.D.W. Jeffreys' and P.M. Kaberry's MSS" (T.S.). Institute of Human Sciences and the Department of History, Yaounde (MS), 1986.

Kaberry, P.M. Field Notes and Transcriptions from Administrative Files 1945-8; 1958; 1960; 1963. Deposited in the British Library of Economic and Political Science (L.S.E.), London. Includes Reports and correspondence from Nso' Informants.

Jeffreys, M.D.W. Bamenda Tribal Notes (T.S., n.d. but mainly 1937-45) in the Bamenda Divisional Archives.

----- . Bansa Tribal Notes 1958-60 (MS), File B. 646: 836, Bamenda Divisional Archives.

The Transfer Of Power And Authority In Nto'ngkar**

BONGFEN CHEM-LANGHEE

The Ngkar chiefdom is an integral part of a much larger polity, the Nso' *fondom* or kingdom, which today claims to comprise the administrative Bui Division of Cameroon. The other chiefdoms include: the closely allied autonomous chiefdom of Oku with a different but allied language; the fraternal chiefdom of Mbiame; the "refugee" chiefdom of Nse', which joined the *fondom* in exchange for protection against Bani, Wiya and Fulani raids; and the conquered chiefdoms of Ndzeen, Ndzerem, Kiluun, Jotin, Dom, Mbinon, Lasin, ngkor and Din. Unlike the conquered chiefdoms of Bamum which were enserfed, resettled and absorbed, the conquered chiefdoms of Nso', "recognizing the paramountcy of the *Fon* of Nso', remained in their original sites, retained their hereditary dynasties, and were allowed autonomy in the management of local affairs except in the matter of war and capital punishment"1. This treatment enabled them to conserve their languages and much of their cultures and traditions intact.

The situation with Ngkar, which is also a conquered Chiefdom², is somewhat different. During the period of the Kovvifem centered *fondom* of Nso', the Ngkar people, who were then not a part of Nso', lived in the area that stretches from Shisong through Kimbo' to Kiyan. But, in the late eighteenth century, when the Nso' decided to make Kimbo' rather than Kovvifem their capital, the Ngkar were conquered and expelled from their settlement site. They then resettled in their present site. with time, however, they were encircled by Nso' villages. No doubt, the Ngkar retained their hereditary dynasty. Without question, they were allowed local autonomy except in the matter of war and capital punishment. But, as in the case of the other conquered chiefdoms of Ndzeen, Ndzerem and Kiluun, their small

** This chapter was originally published in *MUNTU: REVUE SCIENTIFIQUE ET CULTURELLE DU CICIBA* 7(2/e semestre 1987):149-68 and is reproduced here with some modifications by kind permission of the author.

size, the close friendly relations which soon developed between them and the Nso', the intense intermarriage between the two groups, and their complete encirclement by the Nso', resulted in the disappearance of the Ngkar language. Together with other superficially observed elements, this situation gave the impression that the Ngkar had been completely assimilated by the Nso', an impression that is widely believed in the Nso' fondom.

It is this widespread belief that inspired the research for this study, after V.G. Fanson and I produced the first draft of our now completed and published article, "The Transfer of Power and Authority in Nto' Nso'." The purpose was to find out, and then raise issues about culture contact, whether the process of transferring power and authority in the *nto'* or palace of Ngkar has been affected by that of *nto'* Nso' or the Nso' palace, as it is the case with language. This study should, therefore, be regarded as the precursor of many more future studies on the degree to which the Nso' have assimilated the Ngkar, which might throw more light on what happens when two or more cultures come in contact and remain so.

As soon as I began the research, it became clear to me that, culturally, the Ngkar might still be a very different people from the Nso'. The researcher has no problem collecting oral information from the Nso' except, of course, for information dealing with sensitive issues of the secret societies, although he must be ready to contend with conflicting perceptions and information. This situation may help to explain why our article on *nto'* Nso' mentioned above is rich in conflicting perceptions and information. The situation with the Ngkar is dramatically different. I spent the last two weeks of December 1985 and the first week of January 1986 shuttling between Kimbo', Ngkar and Jakiri in a vain attempt to collect oral information for the study. None of the rendezvous I made with potential Ngkar informants was ever honoured. Individual persons I confronted on the spot would not even answer my questions. In the course of these unremitting and unfruitful attempts, one lineage head, *faay* or *shunfaay*, who is also an important functionary of the palace, and whose name I am withholding on request, informed me that no individual Ngkar person, acting on his own, would volunteer any information. He advised me to approach the *Fon* or Chief of Ngkar with my problem. I then went to the *Fon* and pleaded with him for help after I had carefully explained my mission to him. Thoughtfully, the *Fon* looked at me searchingly and asked me to return at 4.00 p.m. on Ntangrin, the seventh day of the Nso'/Ngkar eight-day week, which happened to be Tuesday, December 24, 1985.

I left the palace firmly convinced that the appointed date and time were a bad omen. On that date and time, I was to meet and discuss my problem

with the *ve wonge* (lit. those or owners of the country), a group of sages, power brokers, important functionaries of the chiefdom and custodians of Ngkar culture and tradition. But, 24th December was Christmas Eve, a busy day in the area. Moreover, Ntangrin is the day reserved for *ngwerong*, the regulatory society, whose members come together to share a drink of palm wine and to receive the instructions of the *Fon* and of *ngwerong* at *ngwerong la'*, the *ngwerong's* compound or section of the palace. Since all the *ve wonge*, except the female member of the group, are members of *ngwerong*, it was likely that they would not be able to engage in any meaningful discussion with me. Furthermore, Ntangrin is the market day of Jakiri, which is about five kilometres away from Ngkar. The Jakiri market is in itself little more than a granary, supermarket and a meeting place for social activities and undertakings. It was thus unlikely that the *ve wonge*, who attended the market, would return from it at 4.00 p.m. with a mind alert enough to handle serious discussions. Even the searching and thoughtful way in which the *Fon* looked at me was not encouraging. There was, therefore, every reason for me to be skeptical.

I was not wrong. I went to the palace, in the manner of an African, or at least of a Nso', on the appointed date and time. After receiving me, the *Fon* summoned the *ve wonge* from *ngwerong la'*. Only a few of them were available. The *Fon* then invited me to explain my problem to them. I did. But, as soon as I took out a tape recorder from my pocket, the *Fon* was the first person in the group to object to any tape-recording. When I shut the tape recorder and put it back into my pocket, the *Fon* offered us a drink and left the scene. As soon as he was out of sight, the *ve wonge* politely dismissed me by requesting me to go and come back on the next Ntangrin which, ominously, was the New Year's Day, January 1, 1986. They further urged that, by the time I returned, they would have had written answers to my questions, which questions I had not even asked.

This time, I decided to do more than obey silently. I pointed out to them that I had as yet asked no questions and that the appointed Ntangrin was to be the New Year's Day. They then altered the date to 3rd January, but insisted that my explanation had given them a good knowledge of what I needed. When I returned on the appointed date, and even the next day, I was unable to see any of them, let alone seeing them as a group. However, on 5th January, I tracked down two of them and informed them that I was leaving for Yaounde the next day. They then promised to make available to me the already answered questionnaire through my colleague, Dr. F.F. Mbuntum of Ngkar, who was to return to Yaounde later. subsequently, Dr. Mbuntum brought me a document entitled, "Questionnaire to the Chief-Makers in N.W.P.," and, as it turned out, this was of little value to me.

I felt really frustrated but refused to surrender. One happy evening in June 1986, I visited one of the *ve wonge*, whose name I am again withholding on request, who is resident in Yaounde and, during our conversation, I made him aware of my frustration and how innocent my study was. Since he was to leave for Ngkar the next evening, he requested me to draw up a questionnaire and give it him. The next day, I hurriedly drew up a hand-written, half-polished questionnaire which he took to Ngkar in the evening. On 7th July, I left Yaounde for Ngkar to follow up the matter. While I was there, the *ve wonge* held several sessions, sometimes in the *Fon*'s presence, to answer the questions. But, despite the fact that I was always available, I was never invited to any of those sessions. Indeed, any attempt by me to intrude would have been counter-productive. On 29th July, they handed over to me the results of their deliberations.

If I have taken so much time and space to describe the frustration I experienced in an effort to gather information for this study, it is because of its implications for research concerning Ngkar and my methodology. It seems that either the people of Ngkar are suspicious of researchers or they are unwilling to volunteer information about their customs and themselves. Thus, the impatient researcher, particularly one who wants quick results, is warned off Ngkar. However, my experience suggests that, the patient and innocent researcher can always temper their unwillingness to be co-operative. Since I was not invited to the sessions in which my questionnaire was filled, I was denied the opportunity to ask on-the-spot questions and raise secondary issues whose answers would have filled the gaps in the description that follows and enriched the study. Moreover, the fact that the questionnaire was filled in only by the *ve wonge* in council has robbed this chapter of the conflicting perceptions that enriched the chapter on *nto' Nso'*. The importance of the *ve wonge* as informants, which will become obvious in the next section, is appreciable. But, their refusal to be interviewed individually or to be identified as individuals is regrettable. Furthermore, the *ve wonge* are, in the circumstances, the sole informants for the description that follows, a methodological weakness which, if allowed to stand in my way, would leave Ngkar in indefinite obscurity. Indeed, it is because of this consideration that I have ignored the methodological weakness and have taken the plunge.

The power and authority of the *Fon* of Ngkar can be discerned from the way his subjects perceive him and from his functions and prerogatives. He is seen by his subjects, who sometimes equate him with God, as a special kind of person, because he mediates between them and the gods, and royal ancestors. They also regard him as a lion, the king of animals, because he is their king. At the same time, he is to them the father of the whole nation,

since he is duty bound to treat all his subjects as his children. As the high priest, he sacrifices to the gods and royal ancestors on behalf of his subjects. He makes and confirms almost all appointments to state functions and grants all honours to deserving persons, which appointments and honours he is at liberty to withdraw or withhold. He maintains peace and order and, in recent times, disseminates Government instructions and orders to his subjects.

However, in most cases, he exercises his power and authority through certain institutions and functionaries, some of whom bestow the power and authority on him. The institutions include *ngwerong* and *manjong*, formerly the military establishment which, in the face of modern realities, has been transformed into a social organization that carries out communal work and takes the instructions of the *Fon* to every corner of Ngkar. The functionaries include: the *vibay* (sing. *kibay*), the lineage heads who are also state councillors; the *ataanto'* (sing. *taanto'*), the lineage heads who are regarded as subchiefs³, the *ataw ngwerong* (sing. *taw ngwerong*), the leaders of the *ngwerong* society who, after the first five or six years of their lives, spend at least the next nine years in the palace at *ngwerong la'i* the *ataa manjong* (sing. *taa manjong*), the leaders of *manjong*; the *ayeesum* (sing. *yeesum*), and the *anggwaaang* (sing. *nggwaaang*), respectively the leaders and deputy leaders of the teams of women that cultivate the *Fon's* farms; and, the *ve wonge*, a combination of selected *vibay* and *ataanto'*, *ataw ngwerong* and the *yeefon* (pl. *ayeefon*), the queen mother-of-the-fon, with the *Fon* at their head. Of these institutions and functionaries, only the *ngwerong* society and the *ve wonge* have the right, which they do exercise, to bestow power and authority on the new *Fon*, the same power and authority that his predecessor-ancestor retains.

The idea of ancestor implies that his predecessor must have died from whatever causes. In order to give the impression that the *Fon* is a special kind of person, his illness is not referred to as such. Instead of saying the *Fon* is ill, *Fon joyi*, the Ngkar people say the wind is "passing" (blowing) through the palace, *shweri shaa nto'*. Likewise, the *Fon* of Ngkar does not die: he is simply "missing", while ordinary people die. For the same reason, the *Fon's* illness and death are kept secret from the general public but made known to a few notables. These include the *Fon's* wives, *vikiy nto'* (sing. *wiyi nto'*),- the *Fon's* personal pages, *nshelav se fon* (sing. *nshiyilav fon*), the four state councillor lineage heads with a special privilege to enter the *Fon's* bed chamber, *vibay vee mvem nto'* (sing. *kibay kee mvem nto'*), and the doctors, modern or traditional, treating the *Fon* for his illness, *anggaa shiv* (sing. *nggaa shiv*). Thus, until officially announced, the death of the *Fon* of Ngkar is immediately known only to a select few.

When the *Fon* dies, his corpse is prepared for burial before mid-day because it involves a long and special process, which again stresses the fact that he is not an ordinary person. The *Fon*'s wives seat the corpse on a wooden throne, *kava'*, in the *Fon*'s bed chamber, *faay kishiiy* or *mbve'* (lit. cave), and wash it with palm wine, *melu'*, instead of water. Then the *ve wonge* cloth it with a rare and very expensive hand-made royal cloth, *bveri*, rather than with a blanket or simple white cloth, and cap it with a special royal cap decorated with cowries, *kikfeevi*. After that, they transfer the corpse to "the great-house-of-the-country", *faay wong*, or to the entertainment court, *faay ntari*, and seat it on another throne, to give the impression that it is still alive. As it sits on the throne, those persons who were apprised of the *Fon*'s illness and death continue to treat it as if it were alive, until it is taken to the royal graveyard, *fem*, for burial, after the digging and preparation of the grave for that purpose.

Before the digging of the grave begins, people are assigned to assemble together the funeral paraphernalia. These include: the royal cup, *bom*; a long-necked gourd or pourer, *nggin*, containing palm wine; a royal wreath on which to stand the pourer on the ground, *kitiir*; a new wooden throne; a new bamboo throne in form of a specially made dining chair; a hoe, *kisoo*; a royal walking stick, *kitoom*; a dog, *jwi*; a sheep or ram, *bvey njii*, but usually a ram; several pieces of another royal cloth, *ndzey njav*; a large amount of camwood in powder, *bii*; several bags of salt, *shinggwang*; several tins of palm oil, *menggoer*; several calabashes of palm wine⁴; a piece of bamboo, *kirengreng*, of about two metres long; six well decorated bamboo boards, *viba'* (sing. *kiba'*), each of which is measured to desired length and width; two pieces of camwood, *bii*, measured to desired length; two pieces of another hard wood, *kirum*, which, like camwood, is resistant to destruction by ants or bacteria, measured to desired length; two poles of *bii*, two poles of *kirum* and many bamboo poles, all of which are measured to desired length; many young raffia palms to provide rope; nails; thatching-grass; three stones for a fireplace "the-medicine-of-the-country", *kifu ke wong*, a pollution removing concoction; and, "the-medicine-of-the-royal-graveyard", *kifu ke fem*, a medicinal charcoal powder used as a protection against "the-evils-of-the-royal-graveyard".

As these items are being assembled, the digging of the grave, which is marked by features distinguishing it from ordinary graves, is in process. It is always begun in the early hours of the day, as the corpse is sitting in the *faay wong*, or at the entertainment court, by the leader of the *ve wonge*, Shuufaay Kindzev, the *Fon* aside. He asperges the area of the grave with the *kifu ke wong*, in order to cleanse it of all pollution, makes a few cuts on the ground with a hoe, and then leaves the task to the *ataanto'*, the retainers or *nsheelav*

(sing. *nshiyilav*), and the princes or *won nto'* (sing. *wan nto*),⁵ As the digging of the grave progresses, Shuufaay Kindzev, at intervals, asperges all those present at the graveyard with the *kifu ke wong*, in order to cleanse them of "the pollution-of-the-royal-graveyard". The completed grave is larger than ordinary graves, so that the seated corpse can be brought into it and placed in position with ease. It is about two metres deep, two metres long, and one and a half metres wide. It also has a hole of about one metre wide, one metre long, and one metre high from the floor level of the grave, in one of the long walls. This hole, which represents the *Fon's* bed chamber, is large enough to contain the sitting corpse and the various symbolic items that will be buried with it.

As soon as the digging of the grave ends, steps are taken towards the actual burial of the corpse. The three walls, the floor and the ceiling of the hole in one of the long walls of the grave are covered with five of the decorated bamboo boards, which are held in position by nails. The four pieces of *bii* and *kirum* are placed, in a standing position, against the four corners of the hole, to symbolize the traditional method of holding together the four walls of a house. After that, the whole surface of the five boards and the four pieces of wood is covered with the *ndzey njav*, which is held in position by nails, to bring the building of the *Fon's* bed chamber of the grave to an end. Shuufaay Kindzev then asperges all the persons at the graveyard and clears the graveyard and the palace as a whole of persons not authorized to see the corpse of the *Fon*.

It is now time to bring the royal corpse to the royal graveyard.

Two bamboo poles are each tied to the two legs of the specially-made bamboo throne immediately beneath the sitting surface, which is positioned at the middle of the poles. The corpse is then seated on the throne with the poles, in the manner of a living person, to stress its special nature, and held in position by protectors that give the throne its special shape. After that, two *ve wonge*, one in front of the corpse and the other behind, are helped by the others in placing the poles, bearing the throne with the corpse, on their shoulders. Then, the corpse is carried to the graveyard in the company of the rest of the *ve wonge* who bring along with them the most immediately needed items of the funeral paraphernalia. On arrival at the graveyard, the corpse is placed at a convenient spot and given the necessary exequies, which essentially emphasize its royalty, before it is taken into the bed chamber for burial.

Everything possible is done to underline the special nature of the corpse in the bed chamber. The newly-made wooden throne is placed in position in the bed chamber. The corpse, which still has the special royal cap on, is taken

off the specially-made bamboo throne, which is immediately destroyed, and borne into the bed chamber, where it is seated on the wooden throne. The dog and the ram, representing respectively the male and female slaves who, in the past, were buried with the dead *Fon* to serve him in the other world, are killed and taken into the grave. There, the right foot of the corpse is made to rest on the dog and the left foot on the ram. Then the royal cup is forced into the left hand of the corpse: in the Nso' fondom, only the king and chiefs drink with the left hand. The royal walking stick is leaned on the right shoulder of the corpse, in order to complete the royal insignia—*kava'*, *bom*, *kikfeevi*, *kitooome*—which symbolize the *Fon*'s royalty, power and authority in the grave. After that, the gourd of palm wine is placed before the corpse on the *kitiir*, to provide it with palm wine and underscore the fact that, although dead, the *Fon* is still alive. Then the sixth bamboo board, which now bears a hole pointing directly to the mouth of the corpse when placed in position, is used to cover the bed chamber, so as to prevent mud, which is to be used in filling in the grave, from getting into the *Fon*'s bed chamber.

The filling in of the grave itself has its own special procedure and symbolic representation. Before the actual filling in of the grave begins, the piece of bamboo of about two metres long is put into the mouth of the corpse, through the hole on the sixth bamboo board, and held in position by the *Fon*'s personal page outside the grave. Thus, the corpse is completely blocked from view. Shuufaay Kindzev then invites back those who dug the grave and built the bed chamber therein, but could no longer see the corpse, to fill the grave⁶. A section of the soil dug from the grave is mixed with salt, palm oil, camwood in powder and palm wine and churned with the hands to produce a special kind of mud: palm wine, instead of water, palm oil, salt and camwood are used in this way to underscore the wealth of the *Fon* since, in the past, these were very scarce and expensive commodities; and, the mud is made with hands instead of with feet, to underline the fact that it is not meant for an ordinary house. After the mud has been produced, Shuufaay Kindzev asperges the grave and those present at the graveyard with the *kifu ke wong*, in order to cleanse them of pollution and ensure the sacred nature of the *Fan*'s person. Then, using his fingers, he throws a little bit of the mud into the grave to initiate its filling in. Those present now begin to fill in the grave by throwing the mud, bit by bit, into the grave using their fingers until the mud is exhausted. Then the process of preparing the mud, asperging the grave and people, and filling in the grave is repeated until the grave is completely filled in. After that, the *Fan*'s personal page twists and turns round the piece of bamboo, which is in the mouth of the corpse, a task he

performs every morning to prevent it from getting stuck to the mud. After a year, it is pulled out, living behind it a deep, narrow hole through which future wine libations reach the corpse.

Once the grave is completely filled in, steps are taken to end the burial process. Using the remaining poles of *bii*, *kirum* and bamboo, the young palms and the thatching-grass, a grass-thatched bamboo hut, *fem*, which, in the past, was a house, is built over the grave. This hut is meant to prevent rain water or scorching heat from reaching the corpse and to underline the idea that the *Fan* is still alive and living in the “great house”, *faay*, at the “upper palace”, *nto’ kuy*, as the royal graveyard is more often than not referred to. In order to emphasize the fact that the hut is a special kind of hut, it is provided with a four-layer roof, although only the last layer is thatched with grass. Then, a fireplace is provided near the hut for the use of those who, in the past, lived in the “great house” enclosing the grave.

As soon as the building of the hut ends, Shuufaay Kindzev asperges all the persons at the graveyard with the *kifu ke wong* to free them from contamination. Then, all of them laugh aloud en masse to bring the burial process to an end and to stress the fact that it is the *Fan* who is “missing” and not an ordinary person who has died, since death invites tears, not laughter. When the laughter dies down, *ngwerong*, which has been duly informed, begins to play its music, *tiim* (lit. stand), to officially announce the death of the *Fan*. Then, Shuufaay Kindzev puts the *kifu ke fem* in the left hand of all those who are in the graveyard as they leave the graveyard in silence, one after the other, in order to protect them against any evil. Once each person has licked the *kifu ke fem*, he quietly leaves the royal graveyard. Shuufaay Kindzev is the last to leave the graveyard, leaving behind the left-overs of the funeral paraphernalia, thus ending the burial process and making way for the transfer of power and authority to the new *Fon*.

The candidate who is to become the new *Fon* is selected by three groups of *ve wonge* while his predecessor is still alive. There are the *ataw ngwerong*, whose long residence of at least nine years in the palace at *ngwerong la’* gives them a good knowledge of the customs and traditions of Ngkar and of the characters and background of the princes. There are the specially named *ataanto’*, who, as subchiefs and important functionaries of the palace, are in a good position to study and know the princes. And, there are the specially named *vibay*, who, as important functionaries of the state, are well placed to judge which prince: best qualifies to rule the chieftdom.

The selected candidate himself must fulfil certain conditions. He must be a first generation *wan nto’* or otherwise put, a direct issue of a *Fon* of Ngkar, although it is not clear whether he must be born to his father after he has

already become *Fon*. The candidate's mother must be a native of Ngkar, although it is not clear whether a half native of Ngkar is acceptable. The candidate himself must be free from mental and physical disabilities and "bad diseases" such as leprosy, dropsy, epilepsy, tuberculosis and elephantiasis. Preferably, he should be the son of his predecessor: it is only if his predecessor had no sons, or had disqualified sons, that recourse is made to his brothers or to the sons of earlier rulers.

Although the candidate is selected while his predecessor is still alive, his candidature is not revealed to any person, including himself. When the time for his installation comes, the *ngwerong* persons forcefully bring him from wherever he may be to *ngwerong la'*, from which princes are barred. There, he is made to see the *ngwerong* paraphernalia, known simply as *ngwerong*, for the first time. Then, the *ngwerong* society hands him over to the *ve wonge* who now take him to a more convenient place in *ngwerong la* for installation.

Before the actual installation ceremony begins, Shuufaay Kindze already has in his possession the clothes of the late *Fon* and other royal insignia, which together constitute the installation paraphernalia, and which denote continuity from the old to the new *Fon*, power and authority, and wealth and royalty. These include: the *bverii* the *kava'i* the *kikseevii* the *kitoomi* a royc belt of leopard or otter skin, *kikuuvii* two large bandoliers of thick cloth, usually red, worn across both shoulders, *wav afoi* royal wreath of *Basella alba*, *ror afoi* a solid brass or copper necklace with imprints of a lion on the brass or copper, *kwangi* thick bangle or bracelet, *kisa'i* a bead-embroidered royal horse tail, *deng afoi*.

The installation process is not complicated. At the installation site, Shuufaay Kindzev requests the candidate to undress down this pants and places the installation paraphernalia on the ground in front of him. After that, he requests the candidate to pick them up and put them on. Once the candidate puts on the *kikuuvi*, and picks up the *bveri*, he is helped by the *ve wonge* in putting on the rest, after which he sits on the *kava'* and is now the new *Fon* of Ngkar. Power and authority have now been transferred to him, although his late predecessor still retains the same elements. In recognition of that fact, Shuufaay Kindzev, followed immediately by the *ve wonge*, takes the lead to greet the *Fon* in the traditional manner, *bun Fon*. He stoops slightly forward before the *Fon*, claps his half-cupped hands two or three times, takes them to his mouth, and then pronounces the etiquette word, *nsoon*, a word which also calls the *Fon's* attention.

This recognition of the new *Fon's* power and authority by the *ve wonge* is followed by an introduction tour during which the new *Fon's* power and authority are almost universally acknowledged in Ngkar. From the

installation site, the *ve wonge* lead the new *Fon* first to the general assembly of *ngwerong*, known simply as *ngwerong*, where the *ngwerong* assembly immediately recognizes his power and authority by greeting him en masse in the traditional manner. After that, he vows before the *ngwerong* assembly to rule fairly and like a father, to respect the laws and regulations of the chiefdom, and to be the custodian of the customs and traditions of the people. with that, the *ngwerong* assembly confirms his appointment by formally authorizing him to rule Ngkar, thereby indirectly asserting the authority of the *ngwerong* society over him.

After this confirmation of the *Fon's* appointment by the *ngwerong* assembly, the *ve wonge* lead the new *Fon* from *ngwerong la'* to the *Fon's* section of the palace, the *nto'* proper. There, he first meets the lesser traditional authorities at the resting court, *faay kiresi*, where they immediately *bun* him in recognition of his power and authority over them. Usually, he says a few kind and reassuring words to them. From the resting court, he goes to the audience court, *taa kibu'*, where the populace again *bun* him en masse in recognition of his power and authority over the whole nation. In his maiden address to them, he appreciates their acceptance of his appointment and indicates his policy and priorities. Then he is led from the audience court into "the-house-of-the-country", *lav wong*, where he is introduced to "the-things-of-the-country", *vifa ve wong*. From the *lav wong*, he goes to the women's section of the palace, *nsan*, to greet his wives and the younger princes and princesses. Then he is led to the entertainment court where the older princes and princesses hail him as their new "father" and *bun* him to recognize his authority over them. Usually, he chats with them for a while before going to the *Fon's* bed chamber to complete the introduction tour. In the past, when the new *Fon* was installed before his predecessor was buried, this tour took place after the burial.

There are three other installations of a much simpler nature, which are part and parcel of the transfer of power and authority in *nto'* Ngkar.-The first of these is that of lithe queen mother-of-the-fon", *yaa yeefon*, *yeefon* for short. In order to install this princess, a wreath of *Basella alba*, or, and a *kwang* are put on her neck, to mark out her royalty and nobility. The second is that of the *tav ngwerong*. A new *Fon* must come with a new *tav ngwerong*, who is inherently associated with him. To install him, the candidate is made to undress down to his pants. He is then washed, clothed with a new loin cloth held in position by a belt, seated on a bamboo stool, rubbed with camwood, and then made to take the vow of office. The last is that of *nshiyav fon*. A new *Fon* comes with his own personal page who will serve him throughout his fonship, *ceteris paribus*. In order to install this *nshiyav fon*, his hand is held and

tapped on the door of the *faay ntari* three times and on the support pole in the *faay ntari* three times. This act is immediately repeated at the *faay kishiiy* where, instead of the support pole, his hand is tapped on one of the three stones that demarcate the fireplace. Thus, he is authorized to enter the *faay ntari* and the *faay kishiiy* to perform the necessary duties there, an authorization that brings the process of transferring power and authority in *nto'* Ngkar to an end, a process which has some similarities and many dissimilarities with that of *nto'* Nso'.

In Ngkar, as in Nso', the *Fon* is a special kind of person and everything is done to emphasize that fact. He mediates between the gods of the land, the royal ancestors and his subjects. His power and authority over the whole nation are almost unlimited, although, in most cases, he exercises them through certain institutions and functionaries. Rather than die, he simply gets "missing", and ordinary persons die. He is never ill: but, while in Ngkar, his illness is referred to as the wind blowing through the palace, in Nso', it is the palace that is in a hot condition. The *Fon's* illness and death are kept secret from the general public in Ngkar until officially announced, but, in Nso', they are not.

Although in Ngkar and in Nso', the corpse of the *Fon* is prepared for burial in a special way to distinguish it from ordinary corpses, there are some procedural differences between the two areas. In Ngkar, the corpse is seated on a throne and washed with palm wine in the *Fon's* bed chamber by the *Fon's* wives. Then the ve *wonge* cloth it with a *bveri*, cap it with the *kikfeeri* and then transfer it to the *faay wong*, or to the entertainment court, where it is made to sit, as if it were still alive, until burial, which explains why there is no royal mortuary, *faay kibve*, in Ngkar. On the other hand, in Nso', the corpse is washed with water, camwooded, wrapped in another royal cloth, *kilanglang*, and capped with a *ngwerong* cap, tan *ngwerong*, by the deputy high priests, *ataawong* (sing. *taawong*), and their female assistants, *ayeenwong* (sing. *yeewong*), in the royal mortuary, where it is kept until taken to the royal graveyard for burial.

Likewise, while some of the items included in the funeral paraphernalia are common to Ngkar and Nso', others are not. Those common to both areas include the container of palm wine and its stand, the hoe, the *ndzey njav*, the royal cup, the bamboo boards, the four pieces of *bii* and *kirum*, nails, thatching-grass, the young raffia palms, and the bamboo poles. The new bamboo throne in form of a specially-made dining chair, the tins of oil, calabashes of palm wine and bags of salt, the stones for a fireplace and the *kifu ke fem*, which are typical of Ngkar do not occur in Nso'. The dog and ram of Ngkar are replaced in Nso' by two hind legs of a ram or he-goat,

signifying something else, the piece of bamboo of about two metres long is replaced by a piece of an Indian bamboo of about the same length, the wooden throne is replaced by a bamboo throne, and the *kifu ke wong* is replaced by a slimy pollution removing herbal concoction of palm wine or water, *kiwooy* (pl. *viwooy*). The little amount of salt in a new container, the broad forest leaf, *kiman* (pl. *viman*), the leopard skin, *juv baa*, and the entrails of the sacrificed ram or he-goat, which are typical of Nso' do not feature in Ngkar.

There are also some similarities and differences with regard to the digging of the royal grave and the grave itself in Ngkar and Nso'. In both areas, the grave is larger than the normal grave and has a cubical hole, representing the *Fon's* bed chamber, in one of the long walls, large enough to contain the sitting corpse and the items that are to be buried with it. But, unlike the Ngkar case, the other long wall of the Nso' royal grave is double-terraced, symbolizing the forecourt and the audience court of the *nto'* proper. Whereas in Ngkar the royal grave is dug by princes, retainers and the *ataanto'*, who are excluded from the royal graveyard in Nso', in Nso' it is dug by the cadet royals, *duy*, who are excluded from the royal graveyard in Ngkar. The sacrifice of a ram or he-goat performed at the royal graveyard before the digging of the grave begins and that performed at the royal assembly hall as soon as the digging of the grave begins in Nso' do not take place in Ngkar. The *kifu ke wong* with which Shuufaay Kindzev asperges the grave diggers in Ngkar is replaced in Nso' by the *kiwooy* in the hands of the *yeewong*.

The situation is not less similar with the decoration of the bed-chamber of the grave, the bringing of the royal corpse to the graveyard, the positioning of the corpse in the bed chamber, and the items to be buried with the royal corpse. The bed chamber is decorated in the same way in Ngkar and Nso'. In Ngkar, as in Nso', the palace is cleared of all persons not allowed to see the corpse of the *Fon* before it is conveyed to the graveyard. But, while in Ngkar it is carried to the royal graveyard, sitting on the specially-made bamboo throne, by the *ve wonge* in a quiet procession, in Nso' it is carried to the royal graveyard on a stretcher, head first, by "the-great-lords-of-death", *vibay ve kpu* (sing. *kibay ke kpu*), with the *taawong* playing the state gong, *nggem wong*, at intervals, and the *yeewong* cleansing the path with the *kiwooy* as they go along. Although in both cases, the corpse is buried in a sitting position, the royal walking stick and the headgear which the royal corpse of Ngkar bears are not borne by the royal corpse of Nso'. The dog and the ram buried with the royal corpse of Ngkar, representing the male and female slaves who, in the past, were buried with the royal corpse of Ngkar, are replaced in Nso' by two hind legs of a ram or he-goat, representing the

Fon's share of the funeral sacrifices. Thus, while in Ngkar the corpse is made to rest its feet on the dog and ram, in Nso' the hind legs of the ram or he-goat are placed in front of the corpse, and the corpse is made to rest its feet on the leopard skin. The small amount of salt in a new container, which is placed before the corpse for its use in Nso', and the entrails of the sacrificed ram or he-goat, which are placed before the corpse on the broad forest leave to appease the earth, do not appear on the scene in Ngkar.

In Ngkar, as in Nso', a hut is built over the royal grave. But, that is all there is to it. The roof of the hut in Ngkar has features which distinguish it from ordinary huts, which is not the case with the roof of the hut in Nso'. The fireplace which is provided near the hut in Ngkar is not provided anywhere in the royal graveyard in Nso'. The piece of bamboo which is put in the mouth of the royal corpse in Ngkar before the filling in of the grave begins, and which is pulled out after one year, is replaced in Nso' by a piece of an Indian bamboo, which is put in the royal cup and allowed to remain there *ad infinitum* to serve the same purpose as in Ngkar. While in Ngkar, a special kind of mud, made out of salt, soil, palm oil, camwood and palm wine, is used to fill in the royal grave with fingers, in Nso' the soil dug out of the royal grave is stamped down by trampling upon it to fill in the royal grave. The loud laughter and the licking of the *kifu ke fem* which end the burial process in Ngkar do not take place in Nso'.

The situation with the selection of the new *Fon* is not very different. In Ngkar, the new *Fon* is selected, while his predecessor is still alive, by three groups of ve wonge--specially named *vibay*, specially named *ataanto'*, and *ataw ngwerong*. But, in Nso', he is chosen, after his predecessor has died, nowadays by an informal council of the seven great lords, *vibay vee saamba* (sing. *kibay kee saamba*), the *ataawong* and the *ayeeuwong*, the *ataanto'* vee *saamba* (sing. *taanto' woo saamba*) and the *ataw ngwerong*, representing *ngwerong*. In Ngkar, as in Nso', the chosen candidate must be a first generation prince, although it is now disputed as to whether or not he should be born to his father after his father has already mounted the throne. While in Ngkar, the candidate's mother must be a native of Ngkar, in Nso', his mother must be from a *mtaar'* lineage. In Ngkar, the candidate's maturity and fecundity are ignored, perhaps because the Ngkar prefer direct successions, and his mental and physical health are stressed. But, in Nso', the candidate's mental and physical health are merely implied and his maturity and fecundity are emphasized, perhaps because the Nso' prefer indirect to direct succession.

Nor is the situation different with the installation of the new *Fon* and the transfer of power and authority to him in the two areas. While in Ngkar, the installation of the new *Fon* takes place in *ngwerong la'*, in Nso' it has taken

place, at least in this century, at the Ndzeendzev compound. In Ngkar, the *Fon* is installed by the *ve wonge*, whereas in Nso', he is virtually installed by the *yeewong* with the able assistance of the *taawong* and Shuufaay Ndzeendzev. Although the throne, the royal belt, the royal bracelet and the *ror afon* are common items of the installation paraphernalia in Ngkar and Nso', the *kitoomo*, the *bveri* and the *kiksfeevi*, which are used in Ngkar for the occasion are replaced in Nso' respectively by the *ngwerong* walking stick, *mbang ngwerong*, another royal cloth, *kilanglang*, and the *ngwerong* cap of rank and dignity, *tan mban*. The *wav afon*, the *kwang* and the *deng afon* which are also used in Ngkar for the occasion are not used in Nso'. In Ngkar, the new *Fon* is not linked to the royal ancestors and gods of the land in the same way as in Nso', and power and authority, which the late *Fon* retains as an ancestral *Fon*, are not handed over to the new *Fon* in the same way, although the new *Fon*'s power and authority are recognized in both areas in the same way. And, while in Ngkar, the introduction tour of the new *Fon* takes place within the palace premises and lasts for a day, that in Nso' goes beyond the palace to the compound of the second great lord in rank, Shuufaay Taangkum, and lasts for more than one day.

Finally, in Ngkar, as in Nso', there are three other installations that are part and parcel of the process of transferring power and authority in the two areas. One of them, the installation of the *yeefon*, is common to both areas. But, while in Ngkar, the other two installations involve the *tav ngwerong* and the *nshiyilav fon*, those in Nso' involve the *taawong* and the *yeewong*. It would appear, therefore, that while these other installations focus on the palace in Ngkar, those in Nso' have more to do with the state than with the palace. Whatever the case, it is clear that the differences between the processes of transferring power and authority in *nto'* Ngkar and *nto'* Nso' far outweigh the similarities between them.

The analysis in the preceding section suggests very strongly that, if the processes of transferring power and authority in *nto'* Ngkar and in *nto'* Nso' are accepted as an index of assimilation, the proverbial assimilation of the Ngkar by the Nso' is more apparent than real. But, if linguistic considerations are taken as the measuring rod, the opposite conclusion will be the case. M.D.W. Jeffreys, perhaps unintentionally, suggested as much. In 1944, he interviewed the twelfth *Fon* of Ngkar, Ntani, whom he identified as Tanyi. Then, Ntani was allegedly the oldest person in Bamenda Division and was said to be 113 years, ninety of which he had spent as the *Fon* of Ngkar. At that time, he was the only person in Ngkar who could still utter a few phrases in the language of Ngkar. After a very careful analysis of his interview with Ntani, he concluded that the Ngkar language had disappeared long before

1944, leaving no discernible influence on the Nso' language or Lam Nso' which supplanted it¹⁰. Thus, if linguistic considerations are taken as an index of assimilation, it can be said that the Nso' have completely assimilated the Ngkar in everything but name.

The situation, however, poses several questions, if the two indicators are considered together. Can the conflicting findings be an indication that the assimilation of the Ngkar by the Nso' is still an ongoing process? If so, at what stage in the process of assimilation can a people be said to have been assimilated? Which are the most important elements of a culture which indicate the level of assimilation? Which elements of a culture are more susceptible to assimilation and which are not? Can a people be said to have been assimilated if they still retain intact some elements of their original culture? Can the size of Ngkar, the complete encirclement of the Ngkar chiefdom by Lamnso'-speaking villages, and the daily social interaction between the Ngkar and the Nso' satisfactorily explain the disappearance of the Ngkar language? Is the infrequent occurrence of the processes of transferring power and authority in *nto'* Ngkar and in *nto'* Nso' sufficient reason for their continued co-existence?

I have raised these questions for curious minds and have made no attempt to enter into the much needed discussion of the process of acculturation and the ambiguities which often characterize it. Nor will my scanty evidence allow me at this point to get into a more serious symbolic analysis. This and other issues I leave to experts.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the University of Yaounde which financed this study and to Dr. Lovett Z. Elango who read the first draft of this chapter and suggested ways by which it could be improved upon.

Endnotes

1. E.M. Chilver and P.M. Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda: The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields* (Buea: Government Printer, 1967), p.97; P.M. Kaberry, "Retainers and Royal Households in the Cameroons Grassfields" *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 10:2(1962), 288-289.

2. M.D.W. Jeffreys, "The Death of a Dialect", *African studies*, 3-4 (1944), 37-38.

3. In Nso' proper, the *ataanto'* are lineage heads who are also palace stewards, not subchiefs.

4. As soon as the *Fon* is dead, all exits out of Ngkar are blocked in the traditional way: young raffia palms with their fronds torn into smaller pieces, *virang* (sing. *kirang*), are planted on them. This is to prevent princes from running away from succession and palm wine from leaving the chiefdom. After that, persons disguised in face-covered hooded tunics, *ngwerong* persons hereafter, go around forcing persons with palm wine to take it to the palace. At the same time, the wine-tappers go to one another's palm bush, none being allowed to go to his own, perhaps in order to avoid hoarding, tap the palm wine therein and bring it to the palace.

5. Princesses are also *won nto'*.

6. They bring along the rest of the funeral paraphernalia from the palace to the graveyard.

7. Nso' society is divided into four status categories: the princes and princesses or *won nto'*; the cadet royals or *duyi* the free commoners or *mtaar*; and the retainers or *nsheelav*. Of these, only the *mtaar* are deemed the original inhabitants of Nso' land. Thus, they are usually described and regarded as the true Nso' people or "the-Nso'-of-the-land".

8. In direct succession, the son takes over immediately from the father, whereas in indirect succession sons of earlier rulers take over from their immediate predecessors.

9. The present generation of Ngkar leaders allege that Ntani was the nineteenth *Fon* of Ngkar, an allegation that is not supported by the number of huts over the royal graves, for they insist that all their late chiefs have been buried in the present royal graveyard. In 1944, Ntani, who was at least a generation older than the next oldest person in Ngkar, informed Jeffreys that he had only eleven predecessors, although he could remember the names of only five. See footnote¹⁰. Today, the people of Ngkar still confirm the generation gap between Ntani and the next oldest person in Ngkar at the time. As they put it, by the time Ntani died, there was no person in the Nso' fondom who could say when Ntani became the *Fon* of Ngkar.

10. Jeffreys, "Dialect", pp.37-38.

Glossary

anggae shiv: medical doctors or herbalists

anggaang: deputy leaders of the teams of women that cultivate the *Fon*'s farms

ataa manjong: leaders of *manjong*

ataanto': lineage heads who are also palace stewards and who, in Ngkar, are regarded as subchiefs

ataanto' *vee* saamba: the seven most important ataanto'

ataawong: deputy high priests

atav *ngwerong*: leaders of the *ngwerong* society

ayeesum: leaders of the teams of women that cultivate the *Fon*'s farms

ayeenwong: assistant deputy high priestesses

bii: camwood in any form

bom: royal cup; royal wine; royal water; royal calabash of water or of wine

bun fon: greet the *fon* in the traditional manner *bveri*: rare and very expensive hand-made royal cloth *bvey njii*: sheep or ram

deng afon: a royal horse-tail with a bead-embroidered handle. *duy*: cadet royal

faay: lord; lineage head; great house

faay kibve: royal mortuary

raay *kiresi*: royal resting court

raay *kishiiy*: *Fon*'s bed-chamber

raay *ntari*: entertainment court

faay wong: great house-of-the-country

fem: royal graveyard; hut over the royal grave

fon: king or chief.

fondom: kingdom

fonship: kingship or chieftaincy *juw* baa: leopard skin

jwi: dog

kava': throne

kifu ke fem: medical charcoal powder used as a protection against “the-evil-of-the-royal-graveyard”

kifu ke wong: a pollution-removing concoction *kikfeeri*: a royal cap decorated with cowries

kikuuvi: a (royal) belt (of leopard or otter skin) *kilanglang*: a royal cloth

kiman: a broad forest leaf signifying appeasement

kisa': a thick bangle or bracelet

kisoo: hoe

kitiir: a royal stand for wine dispensers or long-necked gourds

kitooome: royal walking stick

kivooy: a slimy pollution-removing herbal concoction of palm wine or water

kwang: a solid brass or copper necklace with imprints of a lion on the brass or copper

lav wong: house containing the paraphernalia for state rituals *manjong*: formerly the military establishment which today is a social organization which carries out communal work and disseminates the *Fon*'s instructions

mbang ngwerong: *ngwerong* walking stick

mbve': *Fon*'s bed chamber

melu': palm wine

mengger: palm oil or oil in general

ndzey njav: a royal cloth

nsan: women's section of the palace

nsheelav se fon: *Fon*'s personal pages

nshiylav fon: *Fon*'s personal page

nsoon: an etiquette word for calling the *Fon*'s attention

nto': palace

nto' kuy: royal graveyard

nggem wong: state gong

nggin: long-necked gourd or dispenser for palm wine

ngwerong: the regulatory society; the general assembly of the regulatory society; the paraphernalia of *ngwerong*; a person disguised in a face-covered hooded tunic

ngwerong la': *ngwerong*'s compound or section of the palace

ror: a wreath of *Basella alba* worn round the neck

ror afon: a royal wreath of *basella alba* worn on the neck

shinggwang: salt

shuufaay: great lord or lineage head

taakibu': audience court

taanwong: deputy high priest

tan mban: *ngwerong* cap of rank and dignity

tan ngwerong: *ngwerong* cap

tav ngwerong: leader of the *ngwerong* society

ve wonge: a group of sages, power-brokers, important functionaries and custodians of the culture and traditions of Ngkar

viba': bamboo boards

vibay: great lords

vi bay vee mvem nto': great lords privileged to enter the Fon's bed-chamber

vi bay vee saamba: the seven leading great lords who are also state councillors in Nso'

vibay ve kpu: great lords charged with royal funeral sacrifices and burial of the rulers in Nso'

vifa ve wong: state ritual paraphernalia

vikiy nto': Fon's wives

virang: young raffia palms with fronds torn into smaller pieces

wan nto': prince or princess

wav afon: two thick, cloth bandoliers worn crosswise over each shoulder by a *Fon*

won nto': princes or princesses

yeefon: queen mother-of-the-fon

yeewong: assistant deputy high priestess

References

Published Sources

Chilver, E.M. "Chronology of the Bamenda Grassfields", *Journal of African History*, 11:2 (1970):249-57.

-----, "Nineteenth Century Trade in the Bamenda Grassfields, Southern Cameroons." *Afrika und Uebersee*, 45 (4 June 1962):233-58.

Chilver E.M.; and Kaberry P.M. "From Tribute to Tax in a Tikar Chiefdom." *Africa*, 30: 1 (Jan. 1960):1-19.

-----, *Traditional Bamenda: The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*. Buea: Government Printer, 1968. .

Fanso, Verkijika G.; and Chem-Langhee, B. "The Transfer of Power and Authority in Nto' Nso'." *Paideuma*, 35(1989):49-66.

Jeffreys, M.D.W. "The Death of a Dialect." *African studies*, 3-4 (1944) :37-40.

Kaberry, P.M. "Retainers and Royal Households in the Cameroons Grassfields." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 10: 2 (1962):28-9.

Unpublished Sources

Chem-Langhee, B. "Questionnaire on the Transfer of Power and Authority in Nto' Ngkar," deposited with the *ve wonge* of Ngkar.

"Questionnaire to the Chief-Makers in N.W.P.", available from the *ve wonge* of Ngkar.

The Ideology And Political Economy Of Gender: Women And Land In Nso’*

MIRIAM GOHEEN

These are trying times in Cameroon as in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Per capita incomes throughout the subcontinent have fallen continuously during the 1980s while prices have increased dramatically. Economic performance and living standards are now significantly worse than in the 1970s (commonwealth Secretariat 1989). In rural Cameroon, the current economic crisis and its consequences are evident in the routine of daily life. Posters in the banks portray an industrious ant piling up savings while admonishing bank patrons to do the same as a prophylactic against the more disastrous effects of the *Crise Economique*. Women’s wrappers are worn and faded, their voices tired and urgent as they gather around cooking fires to share gossip about market prices and strategies on how best to sell dear and buy cheap to maximize time and money. Taxi parks are crammed full of young boys jostling each other in search of the occasional odd job or just passing time--boys who in better times would be sitting in the classroom--while in the bars men drink palm wine in place of bottled beer and regale each other with financial hard-luck stories, complaining of the salaries and coffee money owed them for the past six months or eight months or year.

High prices, low incomes, long waits for salaries and wages already earned: the economic crisis has cast a shadow on the fortunes of most people in Nso’ in western Cameroon. It has settled most heavily on the lives of poorer farmers and women (categories which substantially overlap) and those who depend on them. The importance of women’s informal sector earnings and of crops produced-for consumption to total household income has increased dramatically as have demands on female time and labour. Higher

* This chapter was first published in Christina H. Gladwin, ed., *structural Adjustment and African Women Farmers* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1991), pp.239-56 and is reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

prices paid for agricultural products have not increased real rural household income since the markup is accompanied by higher marketing costs, and higher prices for essential manufactured goods and for services such as education and health care. While most men can confine themselves to income-generating pursuits, most women, in addition to being heavily involved in food production and assuming the burden of provisioning the household, take prime responsibility as home managers, child bearers, and caretakers of children and the elderly (Commonwealth Secretariat 1989). Women have borne the brunt of the economic crisis; it is they who have had to find the means for families to survive.

Public policy and gender

It is unsettling and ironic that national economic and agricultural policy favours elite farmers at the expense of small rural producers, the majority of whom are women. Women's work in the food sector is a major source of rural family welfare. Furthermore, women's sales of surplus food represent by far the major source of Cameroon's commercial food supply (Guyer 1987). Yet arguably, the policies of Cameroon's current one-party state can best be understood as an attempt to consolidate political hegemony by meeting the interests of the capitalist, professional and upper-level bureaucratic and military classes at the expense of rural smallholders in general and women farmers in particular (Ntangsi 1987, Koopman [Henn] 1989). Agricultural policy, including land allocation and acquisition, is seriously biased in favour of the urban and governmental elite rather than rural smallholders (Koopman [Henn] 1989, Goheen 1988b).

Although they respond more quickly and efficiently and positively to new market opportunities by increasing food production than do men, women food farmers are virtually never included in policy discussions and their interests are rarely if ever given serious consideration (Koopman [Henn] 1989). This paper is an attempt to explain why this is true, in particular with regard to access to land, and why in the long run it is such bad policy for this to be so.

Ideology regarding gender categories has been a primary stumbling block to women's access to resources, particularly to land, in the current political economy. The cultural categories of gender in Nso' today, as in the past, link farming-female-food as a gender marker. The designation of women as primary food farmers and providers has sometimes been problematic but it has until recently effectively encouraged a relative equality and complementarity between male and female qualities (Kaberry 1952; Goheen

1984). With changing material conditions, which are increasingly determined by the political economy of the marketplace and commoditization, the complementary roles played by men and women have become much less equal. Women in Nso' are discovering ironically that the very qualities which have assured their status and power are those which have been undermined and subverted by the marketplace and the increasing differential valuation of male and female work. The contradictions in women's role as primary food farmers have deepened, and there is now evident a "feminization of poverty"—a poverty exacerbated by a growing social stratification in rural as well as urban Cameroon.

Changes in the status of women's roles have resulted partly from the changing meaning of the limits set on women's access to and control over productive resources—especially land and education—and from a simultaneous increase in the demands on female labour and income. In Nso', people are not starving, but some are hungry and malnourished, and almost half the population of rural villages has only a minimally adequate diet (Ariza-Nino et al 1982). The weakening of women's entitlements to land, labour, and credit potentially threatens the nutritional level not only of the rural household but of a large proportion of the national population (Guyer 1987; Hill 1986). In Cameroon women grow the bulk of the food consumed nationally; women in Nso' grow virtually all the food consumed locally as well as significant amounts of the national supply of corn, beans, and Irish potatoes.¹

A decline in national food self-sufficiency over the past decade has intensified the government's interest in developing commercial agriculture in Nso' and the surrounding region. The decline in food self-sufficiency has become an area of focus and political concern for the current regime. Until the mid-1980s Cameroon was almost entirely self-sufficient in food production. This was a source of pride and nationalist rhetoric from the central government. By 1984-85 the percentage was under 90 percent; food imports rose in that year by nearly 8 percent for a total of 40 billion FCFA (Ngu 1989).² This trend has continued into the present, increasing—in rhetoric at least—a national emphasis on agricultural development and commercialized agriculture in the Grassfields region, including Nso'.

The social relations of production in Nso' and the struggles over their changing meaning have created a discourse in which female voices, which should be at the centre of these conversations, are instead muted and often silent. Changing material conditions have exacerbated contradictions in the division of labour, especially where these involve gender roles. I will argue in this paper that a resolution of these contradictions is important to the

production of an adequate food supply and that a necessary step to resolving these contradictions is an understanding of Nso' gender ideology, which emphasizes women's obligation to farm food crops while denying them ownership of the fields. The relevance of women's labour to the production of an adequate food supply will be placed in context through an exploration of the relationships among the household economy, the political economy of land, and gender ideology, along with the cultural norms and practices in which these are embedded in the production and reproduction of inequalities.

I will argue four points in this connection. First, women's labour is the most critical factor in the social reproduction of Nso' society. Second, while gender is central to an understanding of agricultural production and food sufficiency, it is not always sufficient: it must be understood in the context of increasing rural stratification. Third, rural stratification leads to differential access to resources, the most important of which are land and education, which in turn are related to access to the national bureaucracy. Fourth, in a context of increasing stratification and land privatization, Nso' authoritative discourse,³ which places responsibility to provide food and income on women but gives them no control over productive resources, increases gender inequality, marginalizes and impoverishes women, and endangers local and national food self-sufficiency.

Women's Labour in Social Reproduction⁴

Historically the Nso' fondom has been the largest and most powerful fondom in the Bamenda Grassfields in what is today the Northwest Province (NWP) of Cameroon. This Province is today one of two Anglophone provinces in a largely francophone country. Land area is 1,730,000 hectares—approximately 3.8 percent of the national territory. With a population well over one million, the NWP is one of the most densely settled areas in the country, with an average of over 53 persons/km². Over 85 percent of the population lives in rural areas, compared to 72 percent nationwide. In Bui Division, whose boundaries follow the boundaries of the Nso' and two supposedly cadet fondoms, the population is approximately 200,000, with a density of well over 65/km², most of whom are designated - as rural dwellers. Good arable farmland with even marginally adequate transport access is in short supply—a situation which has been exacerbated by both population growth and government programs encouraging agricultural development and land privatization (Scott and Mahaffey 1980; Goheen-Fjellman and Matt 1981; Goheen 1984). We will examine this

relationship in more detail in the next section; suffice it here to say that while it is essential that women maintain access to land within the household economy, this is becoming costly in terms of both time and money.

In order to understand the seriousness of women's marginalization in terms of access to land, we must first have a working knowledge of the domestic economy which relies so heavily on women's labour and their contribution to household subsistence. The household is the basic unit of production.

Over 90 percent of food consumed is homegrown and 85 percent of all income is produced within the household economy--that is, through sale of agricultural products rather than wages or salary. Women's production is primarily subsistence oriented. They till, plant, weed, and harvest virtually all food crops--activities which require year-round, almost daily attention.

While women's labour is allocated to household subsistence, men's labour is allocated to growing cash crops and to investment in capital-intensive and often status-oriented activities. Men and women most often work in different sectors of the economy and do not necessarily combine or allocate their time and resources to maximize the commodity output of the household as a unit (Guyer 1980, 1984; Guyer and Peters 1987; Goheen 1988a).

Husbands and wives keep separate budgets and each is expected to meet expenses--personal, production, and specific family expenses such as medical and school fees--from his or her own earnings. Men and women have different networks and obligations within and between households. The growth of the market economy has created new needs and new visions, increasing both expectations and the amount of cash needed to reproduce the rural household. Thus new demands have been levied on both male and female incomes.

An overwhelming percentage of the food supply is produced by women; they cultivate over 90 percent of the food available to the household. The cultural tradition which places the responsibility to feed the family on women leaves most female farmers with relatively little marketable output and little time to increase production. Yet women contribute 42 percent of the household income in cash value, including the market value of their subsistence crops; one-quarter of actual cash expenses are paid by women's cash income. Women's expenditures are dominated by supplements to the household food supply such as condiments, palm oil, salt, and soap, to name but a few. Virtually all of a woman's cash income is spent on household items and children's education, while men divide their expenditures between capital-intensive items within the household such as zinc for roofing,

furniture, school and medical fees and items outside the household, including gifts to relatives and friends, and payments to men's fraternal organizations where they wine and dine—their compatriots.

The household in Nso' can be seen as the principal place where commodity and non-commodity relations come together. Women's production is oriented toward the production of subsistence (use value) while men's is oriented toward creating capital—both material and symbolic—a much more individualistic quest. The point is not that men are uninterested in the welfare of their families, but rather that they are not held socially responsible for the family's basic food security. They rarely purchase items routinely used on a daily basis to prepare the family meals; when they do purchase consumables these tend to be "prestige" supplements such as sugar, tea, white bread, or meat.

By assuming the social responsibility for provisioning the household, women's labour underwrites and supports men's activities outside the household. Women produce, provision, reproduce, and underwrite the reproduction of social relations not only within the household but within the larger society as well. While obviously critical on the home front, the importance of women's labour transcends the local scene. A significant amount of work on men's coffee farms is done by women, the proceeds of which accrue to the male household head; thus women's labour supports both export and food crops. And women have, throughout Cameroon's recorded history, managed to feed both the rural and the urban population (Guyer 1987; Koopman [Henn] 1989). Clearly it is crucial that women maintain access to land if they are to continue to underwrite not only the local nutrition and the reproduction of social relations but also the adequacy of the national food supply.

While nutrition levels are not yet critical, many households are at risk and are increasingly vulnerable in the context of a process of commoditization and the further development of markets among differentiated rural producers. Land issues loom large since guaranteed access to land is essential to the ability of rural subsistence farmers to continue to feed the household at even a marginally acceptable nutritional level. Land is increasingly scarce and expensive—especially arable land within reasonable trekking distance from rural villages—and it is becoming scarce and privatized in ways which potentially marginalize small farmers, especially women (Goheen 1988b).

Throughout Nso' there is an uneasiness that the commoditization of land and escalating land prices will lead to the marginalization if not outright disenfranchisement of small rural producers. National policies aimed

ostensibly at stemming the tide of dependence on imported foods have instead encouraged land speculation by a growing rural elite who file for large amounts of land for "development projects," which more often than not develop personal fortunes rather than the national food supply. Land for farming even in outlying villages is becoming scarce and often expensive, much to the dismay of most Nso' farmers who consider access to land to be a right of citizenship. A critical aspect of this potential disenfranchisement is the fact that the majority of the small rural producers are women. While individual households have to date been able to gain access to enough land to more or less adequately satisfy subsistence needs, some are having difficulty doing so and many women trek long distances to farm. Since women are viewed as competent to manage the crops but not to own the fields, the trend towards privatization has undermined women's secure rights of usufruct under the traditional tenure scheme. This ideology is played out in the allocation of new land through government development projects that not only discriminate against women but often directly exclude them from participation.⁵

If we just look at national statistics these apprehensions appear unfounded, and consequently land tenure issues until very recently have been largely ignored in accounts of national and international development schemes, with the exceptions of Davison (1988) and Reyna and Downs (1988). These statistics do not allow us an adequate reading of the meaning of land use patterns, and clearly do not give a clue as to regional patterns. Cameroon is an extremely diverse country, both culturally and ecologically.

Land tenure patterns, farm size, and population density vary from one region to another.

National bureaucrats and others in positions of local and regional power use their influence to manipulate the national land ordinances to further their individual positions, both by acquiring substantial amounts of land themselves and by helping others to do so in return for personal favours. It is well known that "they" have differential access to large tracts of land, but names and figures are elusive. Fingers are pointed and rumours abound, but the actual facts do not appear to be a matter of public record (Goheen 1988b; Jua 1989).

While not yet national issues, land scarcity and land distribution have become local issues in the more densely populated rural areas like the Northwest Province, including Nso'. These conflicts are reflected in the increasing confrontations between farmers and herders and in the growing number of court cases involving land disputes. The issues are complicated by a local ideology which stresses that farm land for subsistence production

should be both free and freely available to all. The current conflicts over land in Nso' involve a complex set of issues, which include struggles over the meanings of land, of communal commitment, and of gender.

Land Use, Abuse, and Conflicts

As noted earlier, the Grassfields is viewed as a potential breadbasket by a national government beset by economic problems and sensitive to the political implications of increasingly large food deficits and imports. With a healthy climate and diverse ecological zones, the region has long been a rich agricultural area and centre of long-distance trade. But while the government has a keen interest in developing commercial agriculture in and around Nso', this goal is more easily envisioned than accomplished. Although ecologically diverse and agriculturally rich, this is also an area of steep escarpments cut by low-lying valleys. Poor roads, high transport costs, and consequent low farmgate prices have discouraged commercially oriented food production. Farmers receive less than one-third of retail prices; transport costs account for two-thirds of the markup (Scott and Mahaffey 1980). Most of the fertile low-lying farmland has no road access during rainy season and limited access at any time; many villages have seasonally restricted market access, while much of the area with good market access is either planted with coffee or too steep for mechanized commercial farming.

Transport costs have clearly been a critical stumbling block to increased production. But access to other resources—to arable land and credit for capital inputs—is also a critical factor. The government in Yaounde, while slow to respond to improving the roads, attempted to encourage increased production by instituting a number of land ordinances in 1974 ostensibly aimed at land reform and opening up new areas for production (United Republic of Cameroon 1974; Goheen 1984). Although these ordinances were expressly instituted to clarify land use rights and give small farmers a surety of tenure so as to encourage expansion, they have instead, by virtue of their ambiguous content and relationship to customary tenure, created increasing stratification between the uneducated small village farmers who cannot take advantage of them, and the better-educated rich farmers who can and do. Since customary tenure arrangements are an integral part of traditional subsistence agriculture, the state-promoted economic development of agriculture and privatization of land title have created complex changes in tenure relationships and arrangements at every level of society. At the same time, customary tenure has remained the primary mode of access to farmland for most people in Nso'—for virtually all women—and the ideology that

farmland should be free and available to all Nso' citizens remains a salient theme in local politics.

Rights over control and access to land and the meaning of these rights have become a source of growing controversy and debate. Farmer-herder competition for land and population growth, the most visible source of scarcity, are relatively obvious and conversations about these, while often acrimonious, remain within a familiar discourse. Two other conflicts are also changing the social relations of land control. The first stems from competition over land for commercial as opposed to Subsistence use. This appears on the surface often to be a gender conflict. The second concerns the ambiguous relationship between customary tenure arrangements and national land policy. This may on first reading be interpreted as a national-local conflict.

The role of “Modern Big Men”

But to reduce this problem to a two-factor formula is to oversimplify a complicated set of issues. These conflicts are actually the expression of an increasingly obvious rural economic stratification; that is, they are the result of large-scale land acquisition by the new rural elites which both limits the amount of land available to smallholders and commoditizes land and its use, especially in and around the larger villages. I have referred elsewhere to these new elites as “modern big men” to distinguish them from traditional lineage heads; but traditional-modern is a false dichotomy. The modern big men are actively involved in traditional politics: they obtain titles in secret societies and have become familiar faces at the *fon's* palace. These men have in effect become the new lineage leaders. The participation of the new elites in local cultural and political practices combined with their access to the state facilitates new forms of accumulation which are protected by the old hierarchical order. Land is becoming concentrated in the hands of this new elite—who are almost exclusively male. The position of power of this new elite is both anchored in local tradition and reinforced by its access to the state; new relations of domination become fused with the hierarchy of traditional politics. This collaboration has facilitated the acquisition of land by these new elites through national land allocation grants, which must be approved by both national and traditional authorities.

Women are not precluded in law from access to national land grants. But since in local belief and practice women own only the crops and not the fields, women very rarely file successfully for these land grants. The marginalization of women producers has not been replaced with increased

agricultural production by these new capitalist farmers. To date, little of the land acquired by national grant has been brought into production. Instead it is used for speculation and as surety on loans and investments in commercial ventures and urban properties which bring more immediate returns (Jua 1989). Disturbingly, the practices of these new elites reduce the amount of land available to smallholders and limit the amount of capital invested in food production.

The emerging rural stratification in Nso' is not a question of traditional/modern or local/national or simply male/female: it is a question of differential access to resources through knowledge of how to manipulate both national laws and local institutions. The modern big men take advantage of the ambiguous juxtaposition of national land ordinances with customary tenure arrangements, grafting new inequalities onto the already existing relations of domination. We cannot view the national context and the local context as discrete units nor as directly opposed. But the goals of national policy may ultimately be at odds with local needs and with local values stressing self-sufficiency and freely available land. The struggles over land for subsistence as opposed to cash crops are not simply a gender issue. Given that access to land is crucial to the rural standard of living—indeed to the ability of most households to grow sufficient food—it is important to understand the ability to control land in terms of both gender hierarchy and stratification between households.

New Forms of Stratification

Throughout Nso' history, titled men have enjoyed status and power, a power reinforced by religious beliefs, ritual obligation, and an elaborate code of etiquette. But the material effects of these inequalities have by and large been mediated by obligations between leaders and their dependents, obligations which have ensured access to land to satisfy subsistence needs. What is new is the ability of the new elite to accumulate significant amounts of individual wealth with little consideration of the marginalization of others with regard to access to productive resources. The discourse which emphasizes the ideology that farmland should be free is today not supported by existing material conditions. The fusion of new relations of domination and traditional forms of power protects new forms of accumulation and legitimates new forms of stratification. Within these new forms of stratification gender ideology has contributed to a weakening of women's inalienable rights to land. The ways in which the discourse regarding gender has succeeded in materially reproducing and maintaining women in a

marginal position must be placed within the context of this growing rural stratification.

Household income in Nso' ranges from a high of 7 million FCFA (US \$35,000) to a low of 14,500 FCFA (US \$72.50). (Average annual household income was 447,270 FCFA [US \$2,136], indicating a high degree of stratification within the entire sample.) Farm size and nutrition levels too are unequally distributed (Goheen 1988a). Since credit access often depends on farm size and cash crop production levels, small farmers—male and female alike—have little access to credit. Jua (1989) notes that no small farmers have been given government loans and that the government “displays an inordinate penchant to give loans mainly to civil servants and wage earners wishing to engage in agriculture.” Government loans tend to increase the wealth of these civil servants and wage earners without substantially increasing agricultural production or the actual amount of capital invested in agriculture.

The marginalization of the small farmer is apt to increase in the next few years. The food and export crop section of the sixth Five Year Plan (1986-91) highlights a program to offer credit, production subsidies, and other incentives to so-called “medium scale farmers,” defined as persons who own and supervise production on 50-100 hectares. The average food farm in Nso' is 1.2 hectares; even if the amount of land under cultivation for coffee were added to this, few households have more than five hectares available for food and cash crop production in combination. The “medium scale farmer” of the sixth Five Year Plan are typically local bureaucrats or large-scale entrepreneurs or, even more likely, urban-based elites who may or may not use their credit advantage to increase agricultural productivity (Koopman [Henn] 1988). And clearly, these “medium scale farmers” are not female.

The situation of small producers, especially women, is getting worse. In the context of rather rapid commoditization of land and deepening market relations, access to scarce capital for labour, transport, and expansion becomes more critical. In poorer households women must trek further to farms. Their land lies fallow for shorter periods of time, decreasing its fertility and yield. They contribute a higher percentage of cash income to the household budget and pay a higher percentage of “male” expenses, such as medical and school fees.

Gender Categories and the Authoritative Discourse

In Nso' today, gender ideologies assert the fundamental differences between male and female qualities; these are realized in differences in tools

used, crops grown, plots cultivated, and the division of labour. Social categories of women as producers, provisioners, and caretakers (of food and children) and men as hunters, warriors, and big men—as protectors, status seekers, and authority figures—are reproduced in the division between male and female in production and in the reproduction of the domestic economy.

As is the case with all power relations, gender relations are determined by the material conditions of everyday life. It is an everyday life in which women's work is assigned no real value.

It is an everyday life where, although women produce most of the crops, they are denied ownership of the fields; an everyday life where women are assigned the longest, hardest, most tedious tasks, tasks whose definition as “women's work” involves a downgrading of status and value. It is an everyday life in which the definition of male and female qualities has remained static while material conditions have changed and one in which the complementarity once denoted by gender categories has been lost with the changing material conditions which are increasingly determined by the political economy of the marketplace and commoditization. A woman's everyday life in Nso' today is experienced as one in which male/female cultural categories and qualities guarantee inequality.

Structural Change and Continuity in Women's Position

Women's role as primary farmers has remained essentially the same since Phyllis Kaberry (1952) wrote her classic study *Women of the Grassfields* in which she called women “the backbone of the country.” Today, as in the past, women in Nso' derive a good deal of their status and sense of pride from their position as primary food producers. A woman without a farm is suspect as lazy, a bad citizen, even immoral—clearly not capable of fulfilling the obligations of an adult Nso' woman. Today Nso' women are working longer hours, travelling long distances to farm, are more actively involved in marketing, and are cultivating twice as much land as they were thirty years ago, in order to earn the cash to fulfil their obligation to provision the household. Their control over land has weakened, and their access to credit, labour, fertilizer, and education is much less than that of men's access to such resources. State policies regarding land allocation and agricultural credit for development programs widen the gap between male/female access to crucial assets, while local norms and ideology perpetuate static ideals of male-female roles and spheres of influence.

To understand the dynamics of local and national agricultural production we need to understand the ways in which the structural positions occupied by

both farm women and “big men” are justified by gender ideology and the ways in which these are reproduced by local practices. Differential access by gender to critical resources—land, labour, credit, and education—is central to this understanding. It can be argued that women as a group have been differentially impoverished by the current economic crisis. But gender itself is not a homogeneous, undifferentiated category. The importance of gender should not blind us from exploring other unequal dimensions of stratification which, while not independent of gender, are not entirely conterminous. These include overall access to education, to wage and salaried jobs, to capital, and, perhaps most important, knowledge of and access to the national bureaucracy (Hart 1982; Kennedy 1988; Lubeck 1987; Nafziger 1987).

Conclusion

I have argued that women in Nso’ have borne the brunt of the economic crisis. Women have continued to assume the social responsibility for feeding the household and for finding the means for their families to survive. The sale of their surplus production is a significant contribution to the urban food supply while the labour they perform on men’s coffee farms contributes to cash crop production and thus to government revenues. Yet national economic and agricultural policies favour elite farmers at the expense of small producers, the majority of whom are women.

Placing elite farmers at the centre of the national program to increase food production has troubling implications for the future of the economic welfare of rural smallholders. If the schemes for large-scale capitalist farming succeed, elite farmers will be able to outcompete traditional farmers, and women will lose their only source of income. Even more worrisome is the likelihood that elites will gain control of large tracts of land and fail to develop the food sector, opting instead for export crops or for investments outside the agricultural sector. Women in Cameroon feed both the rural areas and the urban centres. If they lose their ability to do so the overall picture is bleak. Clearly any national policy which fails to incorporate women’s concerns is not only discriminatory but also jeopardizes the long-term utility of the policy itself.

Gender is a— if not the — critical factor to an understanding of the consequences of changing relations of production and the implication of these for agricultural production and food self-sufficiency in Cameroon in general and Nso’ in particular. Although women in effect underwrite the food sufficiency and the social reproduction of Nso’ society, they are

essentially excluded from ownership, inheritance, and real control of land both by the current structure of customary tenure and by national land and development policies. As a group, women also have less access to other crucial resources than do men. But gender in and of itself is not sufficient to our understanding; gender must be understood within the context of a rapidly growing rural stratification—a stratification in income and farm size, in education and access to credit, in employment opportunities, and by unequal access to the national bureaucracy. The power position of the new elites and their differential access to resources including land are facilitated by their roots in local cultural and political patterns—patterns which exclude women from land ownership. What Vaughan (1987:131) notes regarding women's entitlements in Malawi is pertinent here: "... the gender dimension does not always override that of class and employment, but the fact that it sometimes does is nevertheless of interest."

Finally, I have argued that gender in this context cannot be understood without a comprehension of local gender categories and qualities and the ways in which these are maintained in the daily reality of male control of ownership and access to resources. Gender categories assign to "male" the qualities of protectors, status seekers, and authority figures, and to "female" the qualities of producers, reproducers, and provisioners of both food and children. These qualities are reflected in patterns of income, expenditure, and investment, as well as by tools used, crops produced, land farmed, and the division of labour, and are reproduced by daily practices—what Bourdieu (1977) calls "the mundane workings of everyday life." Farming-food-female are linked as gender qualities, although women's role as farmers is limited by the fact that they are precluded from owning the fields. This ideology has been central to women's exclusion from control over critical resources, especially but not exclusively from national land and development projects. If the connection between farming-food-female is to be reproduced in a way that does not ultimately marginalize women's labour and put women (and those who depend on them) at risk, the "farming" in the equation must include ownership of the fields as well as the crops. Otherwise, women in Nso' and those who depend on them could find themselves impoverished, marginalized by contradictions in the very roles which once gave women status and power.

Endnotes

1. See Guyer (1987) and Meilink (1989). According to a 1981 report of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Cameroon, food production comes mainly

from two sources: 1) the “traditional” smallholder sector and 2) agricultural projects in the modern sector. The former is by far the most important, accounting for 90 percent of total grain production (millet, sorghum, and maize), almost 100 percent of starchy leguminous plants, and 90 percent of fruits and vegetables. The traditional smallholder sector is overwhelmingly female. See Scott and Mahaffey (1980) for agricultural statistics for the Northwest Province. The Northwest Province grows approximately one-third of the national food supply of corn, beans, and Irish potatoes. Kumbo (Kimbo’), the capital of Nso’, is a major market in the province, second only to Bamenda, the provincial capital, as an assembling point for foodstuffs shipped out to major urban centres.

2. Ngu argues that the dependence of Cameroon on oil while paying lip service to agricultural development accounts for a good deal of the current economic crisis. He claims that export instability is both undermining the legitimacy of the state and exacerbating the current crisis. Food shortages in major urban centres are predicted by a 1981 USAID-Yaounde study and report, *Plan Alimentaire a long Terme*. Large deficits are predicted for corn (40-60 million tons), beans (8-15 million tons), and Irish potatoes (5-10 million tons), all of which are major exports from the Grassfields region to major urban centres. Deficits are also predicted in palm oil, banana, plantain, rice, groundnuts, vegetables, wheat, cassava, and sweet potatoes. Meilink (1989) also records declining per capita food production beginning in the early 1980s, while the two major cities in Cameroon, Duala and Yaounde, are experiencing annual growth rates of 6-7 percent. The future of food self-sufficiency in Cameroon does not look bright.

3. By *discourse*, I follow Foucault (1971) in meaning not only the language used to describe gender and other relations of power in Nso’ but also the social institutions that help constitute and reproduce that language, including institutions such as the division of labour, the family, and marriage patterns. The term also includes ways of thinking about social institutions as well as the practices which reproduce and sometimes transform these. Following Raymond Williams (1977), *authoritative discourse* is a set of practices and the ideology that reproduces those practices.

4. The quantitative data on which much of the following discussion is based were obtained from a survey of 72 households in eight Nso’ villages in 1981. The information is supplemented by observations and interviews with Nso’ farmers and bureaucrats over a two-year period (1979-81) of fieldwork

in Nso' and from two months of fieldwork in the summer of 1988. The survey included information on land access, nutrition, marketing opportunity, and production choice (Goheen 1984 and 1988a).

5. When in Nso', I questioned the District Officer as to why women had not been granted land within the Young Farmers' Resettlement Program since they are obviously the primary food farmers. The DO replied, "Well, you see, this program is designed to keep young families in the countryside and of course no self-respecting man would want to move to his wife's farm." Whether or not this is true is an empirical question but ideologically it has served to keep women from acquiring land through government development programs in Nso'. Another example: A very well educated Cameroon man from the Grassfields region questioned me as to what I meant when I asserted that women were often discriminated against in national development programs. I pointed out that women had great difficulty getting access to land and therefore were precluded from participation in the Young Farmers' Resettlement Program or effectively from acquiring national land under development projects in general.

He said, "Oh, well, *land--of* course you cannot be giving women land: it would destroy our whole social system!"

References

- Ariza-Nino, Edgar, M. Goheen-Fjellman, and L. Matt. 1982 *Consumption Effects of Agricultural Policies: Cameroon and Senegal*, center for Research on Economic Development, University of Michigan.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Commonwealth Secretariat. 1989 *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s*. London: Marlborough House.
- Davison, Jean. 1988 *Women, land, and Agriculture: The African Experience*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Foucault, M. 1971 *L'Ordre du Discours*. Paris: Gallimard.

- Goheen, Miriam. 1984 "Ideology and Political Symbols: The Commoditization of Land, Labour and Symbolic Capital in Nso, Cameroon." Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University.
- 1988a "Land and the Household Economy." *Women, Land and Agriculture: The African Experience*, Jean Davison, ed., pp.90-105. Boulder: Westview Press.
- 1988b "Land Accumulation and Local Control: The Manipulation of Symbols and Power in Nso." *Land and Society in Africa*, S. Reyna and R. Downs, eds., pp.140-162. Hanover, N.H.: University of New England Press.
- 1991 "Buying Legitimacy: Secret Societies, Titles and the Modern Big Men of Nso." *African Transformations*, Jane Guyer, ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Goheen-Fjellman, M.; and Matt, L. 1981 *Effects of Demand Aspect on Production and Nutrition*. In-country report for USAID Contract DSAN-C-02770, Yaounde.
- Guyer, Jane. 1980 "Female Farming and the Evolution of Food Production Patterns Amongst the Beti of South Central Cameroon." *Africa*, 50:341-56.
- 1984 *Family and Farm in Southern Cameroon*. Boston: Boston University African Research Series 15.
- 1987 *Feeding African cities*. Manchester: International African Institute, Manchester University Press.
- Guyer, Jane; and Peters, Pauline. 1987 "conceptualizing the Household." *Journal of Development and Change*, Special Issue, pp.197-214, June.
- Hill, Polly. 1986 *Development Economics on Trial: The Anthropological Case for a Prosecution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jua, Nantang. 1989 "The Petty Bourgeoisie and the Politics of Social Justice in Cameroon." *Proceedings/contributions: Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon: Historical Perspectives*, Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings, eds., pp.737-96. Leiden: African Studies centre.
- Kaberry, Phyllis M. 1952 *Women of the Grassfields*. London: H.M.S.O.
- Kennedy, Paul. 1988 *African Capitalism: The struggle for Ascendancy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Koopman (Henn), Jean. 1989 "Food Policy, Food Production and the Family Farm in Cameroon." *Proceedings/Contributions: Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon: Historical Perspectives*, Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings, eds., pp.531-556. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Lubeck, P.M. 1988 *The African Bourgeoisie*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Press.
- Meilink', H.A. 1989 "Food Price policy and Food Production in Cameroon." *Proceedings/contributions: Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon: Historical perspectives*, Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings, eds., pp.587-596. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Nafziger, E. Wayne. 1987 *Inequality in Africa: Political Elites, Proletariat, Peasants and the Poor*. Cambridge: Cambridge university Press.
- Ngu, Joseph N. 1989 "The Political Economy of oil in Cameroon." *Proceedings/Contributions: Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon: Historical Perspectives*, Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings, eds., pp.109-146. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Ntangsi, Joseph. 1987 "The Political and Economic Dimensions of Agricultural Policy in Cameroon." Manuscript, World Bank, Washington, D.C.
- Reyna, Steven; and Downs, R. 1988 *Land and society in Africa*. Hanover, N.H.: University of New England Press.
- Scott, W.; and Mahaffey (Goheen), M. 1980 *Agricultural Marketing in the Northwest Province, Cameroon*. Yaounde: USAID.
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID).1981 *Plan Alimentaire a Long Terme*. Mimeo. Yauonde:USAID.
- Vaughan, Megan. 1987 *The story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in 20th century Malawi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977 *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The Nso' Area Cooperative Union¹

BONGFEN CHEM-LANGHEE

Introduction

In 1978, the members of the Nso' Area cooperative union (NACU) expressed general dissatisfaction with the management and financial problems of their Union. The next year, the Nso' students blamed their parents' difficulties in financing their education on the mismanagement and financial problems of the Union. Soon after that, the Manager of the Union, Isaiah Tum Tafon, who held office from 1976 to 1981, blamed the financial problems of the Union on both the North West cooperative Association (NWCA) and the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB), and threatened to take legal action for libel against the students. In 1981, government auditors discovered that the financial and managerial chaos of the Nso' Union was shared by the other unions in the region and their apex organization, the NWCA. This led to the dissolution of the Boards of Directors of the NWCA and the Nso' Union, whose Manager was also dismissed from office and sued for mismanagement. These events enlisted my interest in the Nso' Union and prompted this study. Its aim is to record the history of the Union and suggest solutions to some of its problems.

Origin

The NACU was a product of the involvement of men in the cultivation of a new, mass cash-crop in the Bamenda Grassfields. Before then, the traditional economy of the Bamenda Grassfields as a whole was dominated by peasant, subsistence agriculture in which women played a dominant role and almost exclusively tilled the soil.² The most important cash-crops were kolanuts and tobacco. Although they were largely in the hands of men, they were not cultivated on a mass basis, and their modes of production and processing, quantity, and marketing systems did not necessitate the creation

of any modern mode of cooperation. During the colonial period, the British tried to involve men in the cultivation of exotic vegetables for sale in the urban areas and nearby French plantations.³ But this, too, failed to induce the creation of a cooperative organization. What finally produced such an organization was the successful introduction of Arabica coffee to the region in the early 1930s, and its mass cultivation by both men and women.⁴

Initially, the cultivation of coffee was mainly in the hands of Catholic Christian nuclear families because of the early and widespread involvement of the Catholic clergy in its propagation.

During these early years, coffee plots were located near the compounds where hearth-ashes and sweepings had fertilized the soil and tree crops provided shade for coffee trees. Later, as more and more people took to the cultivation of coffee, fallow food lands which required little clearing and were near settlements and feeder roads came under coffee culture, although a few people planted the crop on lineage lands which were located away from settlements and had not been in recent cultivation. It was at this time that casual, paid labour entered the scene. Thereafter, more and more virgin lands, located away from the main settlements, were brought under coffee culture. These were relatively large farms owned by traditional authorities who controlled well-situated lands and had access to free labour, and by large entrepreneurs, political leaders, and salaried officials who had the resources to hire seasonal labour and transportation.⁵

As more and more land and people became involved in coffee cultivation, coffee production increased so much that the need arose for an organization to handle coffee-related problems such as processing, grading, transporting, and marketing. This urge grew stronger when some of the coffee growers became aware that such mutual self-help Arabica coffee organizations were already existing in Dschang and Bafusam. Thus, in 1950, the first Arabica coffee cooperative society emerged at Bafreng to process, grade, transport, and market its members' produce. Soon after that, it was discovered that this single society did not have the capacity to handle the region's produce alone, and that it entailed transport difficulties for some of its members. The outcome was the decision to create more societies in the region. Thus emerged the Bamenda, Nso', Bafut, Santa, and Bali Cooperative Societies which jointly formed the Bamenda Provincial cooperative Produce Marketing Union (BPCPMU) on 21 August 1953. Its main aim was to market its members' produce.⁶

Thereafter, the production of coffee in the region increased further and outstripped the capacity of the existing cooperatives to handle the produce and thus created the need for more cooperatives. By 1958, there were already

twenty-five Cooperative Societies in the Nso' and Nkambe areas. These Societies applied and were authorized to form the NACU in 1958 and registered it on 19 November 1959.⁷ Its aims have evolved with time and circumstances.

Aims

Originally, the aims of the NACU were self-centred and directed towards solving coffee-related problems of its members. Thus, the NACU was to assist its members to prepare, process and market their produce. It was also to help them to raise the quantity and quality of their produce, and to arrange the distribution of advances and loans to them in accordance with the rules prescribed by the apex organization. Further, it was to undertake measures aimed at promoting the cause of cooperation. As time went on and the NACU became firmly established, it extended its aims to include the general welfare of its members and the Nso' society as a whole. Thus, it was also to provide a supply service for its members at prices designed to bring a fair return on their investments, and to work in partnership with the Nso' Area Council and Cameroon Government in the development of Nso'. Finally, it was to ensure its existence through improved standards, and to provide gainful employment for the people of Nso' on a regular basis. And, when it became involved in a serious crisis of confidence at the turn of the seventies, it made the attempt to restore the public trust and confidence which it once enjoyed one of its major aims.⁸

Evolution

The creation of the Nso' Union was followed by that of the Kom, Bamenda Central, Santa, Bali, and Ndop Unions, and by the dissolution of the BPCPMU on 16 October 1959. In 1961, these six Unions jointly formed a new umbrella organization, the Bamenda Cooperative Marketing Association (BCMA). Its aim was to buy, haul, and market its members' produce, and make advances and loans available to the farmers. It was thus the link between the Unions, Societies, and farmers on the one hand and the West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB), which exported most cash-crops from the state, on the other. By 1964 the Pinyin and the Moghamo Unions had increased the membership of the BCMA to eight. During these early years, the annual production of coffee of the Nso' Union area increased steadily. (See Table 1).

TABLE 1 COFFEE PRODUCTION OF THE NSO' UNION (TO THE NEAREST TON)

1959 - 64, INCLUSIVE

1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	Average
349	441	491	670	1,240	935	c 688

Source: Tamanjong, "Brief Notes on Nso Union", annex.

Also, during these early years, the Nso' Union was entangled in uncertain events. In 1961, it decided that it would construct an office building for about £800. On 3 October, its Finance Committee met and laid down the conditions for the award of a contract for the building. On 18 October, the same Committee met after office hours and unanimously awarded the contract to the president of the BCMA, S.K. Kilo, for the £1,100 which he had tendered. In doing so, it paid no attention to some of the conditions it had stipulated for the award of the contract.

Moreover, since the Union had no funds of its own at the time, the £700 which was used in paying the first instalment on the day the contract was awarded belonged to the farmers who soon needed it.⁹ Thus, the Union paid more for the contract than it had intended and the farmers were deprived of their money when they most needed it.

That was not all. As the first general elections of 7 January 1962 to the West Cameroon Legislative Assembly approached, the candidate of the opposition for Nso' South riding, S.K. Kilo, connived with the secretary of the Nso' Union and that of the Kimbo' Society and issued a circular letter No. NCU/54/53 of 14 December 1961. This letter alleged that the price of coffee was to fall as from 1 January 1962. Thus it advised the Societies in the Nso' Union area to turn in their crop before that date in order to avert the anticipated lower price. This allegation caused panic among the farmers and forced some of them and the Societies to sell their stock to private Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs). Moreover, some local politicians used the anticipated fall in price to blackmail the Government and win votes for the Opposition, while others used it to demonstrate the Union's general hostility to the Government.¹⁰ The net effect of all this was a reduction in the amount of coffee which the Union handled during that season which, in turn, necessitated a reduction in the bonuses which it received from the Marketing

Board. Moreover, the public trust and confidence which the Union had begun to enjoy was undermined.

Despite this unpromising situation of the Nso' Union, the number of Cooperative Societies in the Bamenda Grassfields as a whole continued to increase in response to the decision of the West Cameroon Government to use the Cooperatives as an instrument for increasing coffee production and developing the rural areas. By 1966, there were already 103 Societies in the Nso' and Nkambe areas, some of them unregistered. Those of them which were less viable and were unregistered were encouraged to merge or dissolve while the registered ones were admitted to the NACU membership. 11 Three years later, the Government decided to make the Unions the only LBAs for the WCMB in the region. This removed competition from private LBAs and granted the Unions the monopoly for the marketing of produce in the region. It also caused the BCMA to transform into the Bamenda Cooperative Association (BCA) on 9 July 1970, with functions other than the marketing of coffee.¹²

Before the BCMA transformed into the BCA, however, the Nkambe-based Societies had pulled out of the Nso' Union to form the Nkambe Union which was registered on 17 February 1969. They took along with them the officials and workers of the Nso' Union who were indigenous to the Nkambe area.¹³ This move created new employment opportunities and responsible office positions for the people of the two areas. It also provided an ethnic base for the two Unions with which their members could identify, which was in itself a source of strength for the two Unions. Furthermore, it made for more efficiency: the steady production of coffee of the Nso' Union after the withdrawal (see Table 2) suggests that the Union might have grown to the point of diminishing returns which necessitated a split in the interest of low costs, less transport expenses, better management, and closer democratic supervision. But the move was also a negative force in several respects: the Nso' Union lost the bonuses and the Block Buying Allowance (BBA) which it was to receive for the produce of the Nkambe area from the Marketing Board to compensate for its costs and leave it with a small margin; henceforth it was to send fewer representatives to the apex organization than before and this lowered its prestige in that organization; and, the ethnic consciousness which it emphasized was not conducive to national unity and integration.

Whatever the case, the Nso' Union suffered further reductions in its membership between 1973 and 1975. In 1972, the Federal Republic transformed into the United Republic of Cameroon and, in 1973, its Government created a Department of Cooperation and Mutuality within the

Ministry of Agriculture. This Department was charged with the supervision of the Cooperatives in the Republic as of 29 October 1974. The WCMB was also transformed into the Produce Marketing Organization (PMO). Within these new structures, Cooperative Societies were amalgamated, where necessary, to make them viable. This process reduced the number of Societies in the Bamenda Grassfields as a whole from 251 in 1973 to 100 in 1974. In the Nso' area, the reduction was from 66 to 33 within the same period.¹⁴ In October 1975, the Nso' Union witnessed another reduction in its membership when the Oku- and Noonni-based societies also withdrew from it to form the Oku-Noonni Union which went into operation in January 1976. They also took along with them the officials and workers of the Nso' Union who were indigenous to the Oku and Noonni areas.¹⁵ To a large extent, this move involved the advantages and disadvantages associated with the withdrawal of the Nkambe-based Societies from the Union. But it also marked the beginning of a downward turn in the annual coffee production of the Nso' Union, a downward turn from which it has never recovered. (See Table 3).

Table 2. Coffee Production of the Nso' Union (To the nearest ton) 1965-75, inclusive

1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	Average
2,161	2,071	2,725	2,406	2,151	2,400	2,400	2,921	3,097	2,717	3,654	c2,609

Source: Tamanjong, "Brief Notes on Nso Union", annex.

The year 1976 also marked the beginning of further changes in the cooperative structures of Cameroon. At the national level the *Caises de Stabilisation*, which exported certain cash-crops from the francophone section of the country, and the PMO were jointly replaced by the NPMB or *Office National de Commercialisation des Produits de Base* (ONCPB) on 9 September 1976, in an attempt to harmonize the marketing institutions of the francophone and Anglophone sections of the country. This new organization was charged with the exportation of cocoa, coffee, cotton groundnuts, and palm kernels from the whole country. At the regional level, the BCA, which now included eleven members, was transformed into the NWCA in 1978, in response to the Government's decision to induce viable multifunctional cooperatives at the provincial and divisional levels. The NWCA once more assumed the marketing responsibilities for the North West Province.¹⁷ The Union thus lost their marketing monopoly and ceased to be the LBA for the

NPMB. The Cooperative Inspectors who were previously employees of the Unions became the employees of the NWCA. This reduced the amount of local influence on them as they could now be transferred from one Union to another.¹⁸ At the local level, the Societies of the Nso' Union decreased from 33 in 1974 to 18 in 1982 and to 6 in 1987, the current number. These reductions were due to the desire of the Government to reduce the number of the primary societies in the various Provinces in the interest of viability and low costs.¹⁹ These changes did not, however, affect the administrative structures and organization of the Nso' Union.

Administrative Structures and Organization

The basic units of the Nso' Union are its member Societies. Each of them has its own General Assembly, Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Management, employees, and a large central compound where it buys produce from individual members. The total number of the individual members of all the Societies in 1979 was 8,708--6,010 men and 2,698 women. By 1985, the number-had decreased to 5,124.²⁰

Although these individual members of the various Societies are, by extension, also members of the Union, the majority of them have little contact with that organization. Indeed, their main contact with the Union is through the representatives whom they elect to represent them in that organization. They also have little contact with their individual Societies after they have turned in their produce or after they have attended the General Meeting of the Societies. Thus, the Union and its member Societies are denied democratic supervision.

Table 3. Coffee Production of the Nso Union (to the nearest ton) 1976-87 inclusive

1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	Average
1,725	1,776	1,206	2,291	1,485	1,494	1,065	1,282	568	909	1,211	1,331	c.1,362

Sources: Tamanjong, “Brief Notes on Nso’ Union”, annex; Cameroon, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of cooperation and Mutuality, Cameroun: *La Coopération en chiffres* (Yaounde: CoopMut, 1988), p. 13, for the 1986 and 1987 figures only.

NOTE: The 1984 drought was responsible for the very low production figures of 1984 and 1985.

While the Societies are the basic units of the Union, its main organ is the General Assembly which makes its policies. It consists of unpaid proportionally elected representatives of the various Societies.¹ As unpaid representatives, they do not devote enough attention to the Union and are rarely in touch with it after they have attended its General Meeting. Thus, the officials and workers of the Union are hardly supervised by them. However, after every two years, they elect from within their ranks a Board of Directors who take decisions for the Union but are not paid for that duty. The Board is headed by a President and a Vice-President who, together with the Trustee, form the Executive Council. The Executive Council works out the details of the decisions of the Board, acts as its standing committee, and supervises the Management. But, it is not paid for those duties. However, the Chief of Section for cooperation and Mutuality for Bui Division and the Manager of the Union usually attend its meetings in an advisory capacity. There is also the Management which consists of the employees of the Union—Manager, staff, and workers. It is divided into the General Administration, Finance and Accounts, Fieldwork, Mill and Stores, and Supply Service Divisions. It ensures the day-to-day functioning of the Union and organizes its finances.²²

Sources of Finance

The Union obtains some of its finance from the various charges which it levies on its members. For example, it charges its member Societies a registration fee of 300,000 francs CFA and makes them pay for the labour

and machine costs of hulling and grading their produce.²³ Moreover, it makes weight deductions of about 3.5 percent on its members' produce and deducts about 6.5 percent of the same produce for bad and damaged beans. Furthermore, its members surrender about 0.5 percent of their produce to it to cover its transport expenses.²⁴

Profits and commissions from its commercial activities, interests from loans, and produce from its demonstration farms are also important sources of its finance. For example, between 1976 and 1978, it made a profit of 164,742,854 francs CFA from the sales of Arabica coffee and 8,444,389 francs from the commercial activities of its Supply Service. Within the same period, it loaned 72,700,000 francs to the farmers at an interest rate of 8 percent per annum, and marketed one ton of its members' Robusta coffee for a commission of 7,750 francs. Every year, it earns some money from the sales of produce from its demonstration farms. 25

The other important sources of its finance include loans, bonuses, grants and allowances. Since the Union has no working capital of its own, it usually borrows such funds from the NPMB in form of advances free of interest.²⁶ It also borrows money from other financial institutions. For example, between 1976 and 1977, it borrowed 84,200,000 francs CFA from the *Fonds National de Developpement Rural* (FONADER) at an annual interest rate of 5.75 percent and 40,000,000 francs from the Credit Union League at an interest rate of 12 percent per annum.²⁷ It also receives grants for itself and bonuses for the farmers for their produce from the NPMB. For example, between 1976 and 1978, it received 27,669,287 francs in grants for itself and 235,156,595 francs in bonuses for the farmers for their produce from the NPMB. Out of 132 francs per kilogram of Arabica coffee which the NWCA receives from the NPMB as BBA for its produce, 89.3 francs go to the various Unions in the region and 12.2 francs go to their various societies. Thus, the Nso' Union receives 89.3 francs and its Societies receive 12.2 francs for every kilogram of Arabica coffee which they sell to the NPMB through the NWCA. Although the practice was discontinued when the NPMB began to play an increasing role in the haulage of produce, the NPMB used to pay to the Unions a Transport Differential (TD), an allowance which was meant to compensate them for transporting produce to its stores. However, it continues to pay them a collection allowance to cover their costs of transporting produce from the primary buying points to their main stores.⁸ It is with these finances that the Nso' Union strives to achieve its objectives.

Achievements

The Union has been marketing the produce of its members and assisting them in the preparation and processing of their produce over the years. For example, between 1959 and 1987 it marketed 50,173 tons of Arabica coffee for its members²⁹, and has also been marketing their Robusta coffee, palm oil, corn, Irish potatoes, beans and rice for them. In 1969, it set up a three-line coffee mill in its main store at Tobin to process coffee and a line of 4 rice machines to hull and polish rice. It recently purchased a yet uninstalled Giant Rice Mill with a capacity far beyond the needs of its rice farmers. In order to reduce the transportation costs for distant members, it constructed a depot at 'Taakija' and another one at Jakiri where it stores the produce from the ngkum and Dzeekwa' areas respectively. In the past, it had a fleet of 10 vehicles with a total capacity of 41 tons, 7 of which were used for transporting produce, although only 1 of them can still do so today.³⁰

The Union has also been helping its members to raise the quantity and quality of their produce and diversify their crop production and sources of income. It runs a farm competition programme which enables the farmers to give proper care to their farms and crops. Its Manager and Board of Directors collaborate with the relevant Services of the Ministry of Agriculture to educate the farmers on the proper use of fertilizers and chemicals during annual meet-the-farmers tours. It has a farmer's tractor which helps the rice producers to plough their farms at low cost. It distributes bonuses to induce the farmers to produce more and better quality produce. In order to encourage the farmers to diversify their crop production and sources of income, it set up wheat, rice, soybean, Irish potato, and coffee demonstration farms at Tobin, Mbiame, Ngkar, Jakiri, Mantum and 'Taakija', which served as pilot zones for further expansion. It has also introduced cocoa farming in the area. With the aid of the now defunct Wum Area Development Authority (WADA), it introduced an animal traction (ox-plough) programme for the cultivation of wheat and Irish potatoes at 'Taakija'.³¹

Furthermore, the Union has been arranging the distribution of advances and making loans available to farmers while promoting the cause of cooperation. For example, between 1976 and 1977 it loaned the sum of 72,700,000 francs CFA to the farmers at an interest rate of 8 percent per annum out of the 84,200,000 francs which it borrowed from FONADER at an interest rate of 5.75 percent per annum. In order to promote the cause of cooperation, it hosts seminars and workshops for cooperatives in Bui and Donga Mantung Divisions and organizes a seminar for its Societies, Board of Directors, farmers, and employees every year. It also encouraged the creation

of the Credit Unions, the Oku-Mbiame Honey Cooperative society, the Nso' Women's Cooperative, and the Mbo' Nso' Rice Farmers Society, the last two of which it supported financially and materially until they were able to stand on their own feet. Furthermore, it has been training its staff at the Cooperative Colleges in Ibadan and Bamenda and educating the farmers on such issues as general cooperative principles, prices of coffee, bonuses, the general marketing of produce, tare deductions, and the proper use of fertilizers and chemicals.³²

Finally, the Union has been doing a lot to improve its lot and the general welfare of its members and of the society and nation as a whole. It has supplied its members with a Supply Service whose prices are designed to bring a fair return on their investments. Until recently, this Supply Service provided its members with building materials, farm tools, domestic equipment, fertilizers, and plant improvement chemicals. Due to the recent financial problems of the Union, the supply Service now handles only farm tools, fertilizers, and chemicals, the last two of which it sells to members at subsidized rates. With funds from the Government, the Union has resettled 205 young farmers of Bui Division. Between 1968 and 1969, it provided 630,000 francs CFA in scholarships for children of Bui Division and contributed 1,200,000 francs towards the construction of the Kimbo' Post Office. In 1970, it donated 350,000 francs to the Shisong Orphanage. Two years later, it contributed 150,000 francs towards the Agricultural Show which the Nso' Area Council organized. In 1974, it spent 417,000 francs in repairs on roads and bridges in the area. It also contributed financially towards the construction of the Fon's bedchamber and the stadium at Tobin, and provided a dump truck service to the Highways Department and a transport service to the Community Development Department for road construction and development projects in the Division. It has been donating generously to local football and sports clubs and the national political party, and providing gainful employment for the people of Nso'. In order to ensure its existence, it set up a modern garage for servicing its vehicles, coffee mill, and rice machines, and constructed seventy-one functional buildings, including an incomplete office complex, for itself. Recently, it dismissed and took legal action against important members of its Management, who were accused of irregular activities, and has taken steps to pay for its members' produce and liquidate its heavy debt, in order to restore the public trust and confidence which it once enjoyed and thus solve one of its most serious problems.³³

Problems

As already seen, the problems of the Union began in October 1961 when its Finance Committee caused it to lose money in an irregular award of a contract. Two months later, the Union was involved in an electoral manipulation which undermined the public trust and confidence it enjoyed and threatened its existence. Although the situation returned to normal, a new kind of problem cropped up when the Nkambe-based Societies pulled out of the Union in 1969. This precedent was followed by the withdrawal of the Oku- and Noonni-based Societies from the Union in 1975. The disadvantages of these withdrawals to the Union outweighed their advantages, particularly in the case of the second withdrawal.

As soon as the second withdrawal occurred, the Union entered a period of mismanagement which lasted from 1976 to 1981.³⁴ During this period, the Union purchased and allegedly installed a Giant Rice Mill with a capacity far beyond the needs of its farmers for 100,000,000 francs CFA.³⁵ It also made large and, sometimes, irrecoverable loans to its employees, members, and even non-members. At one point, these loans amounted to 98,000,000 francs CFA. It carried its extension and diversification programmes far beyond its resources and continued to maintain projects which were no longer economically justifiable, such as a programme to cultivate an area (Taakija) with ox-drawn ploughs for wheat and Irish potatoes. It provided free dump truck and transport services for the Highways and Community Development Departments and donated generously to football and sports clubs and the national political party without due regard to its financial resources.³⁶ Furthermore, its Management increased the wages of its employees without its authorization or approval.³⁷

Mismanagement was in itself a serious problem for the Union. But its effects were more disquieting. It involved the Union in a huge debt which amounted to 450,000,000 francs CFA in 1983. By January 1986, it had been reduced to 212,000,000 francs, still a big amount for an organization whose authorized share capital is 150,000,000 francs. During that year, the Manager of the Union remarked that the debt of the Union "has been the most aching problem of union management since June 1982 ... and the only one that has slowed our forward march."³⁸ Moreover, it made it difficult for the Union to maintain more than one of its ten vehicles. This has led to transport difficulties and created the need for vehicles which the Union cannot afford in the present circumstances. Furthermore, the Union has been finding it difficult to pay for the produce of the farmers over the years, although the NWCA was responsible for this between 1979 and 1982 when it diverted

farmers' funds to ambitious investments.³⁹ The farmers have responded to this situation by smuggling produce out of the area, ceasing to extend coffee planting and switching from the cultivation of coffee to the cultivation of food-crops such as rice, maize, beans, cocoyams, Irish potatoes and groundnuts which, they say, bring quick financial returns. This has led to a reduction in the amount of coffee the Union handles annually, a problem that the 1984 drought and the recent coffee blight aggravated.

The response of the farmers to the financial problems of the Union was symptomatic of a more serious problem, the erosion of the public trust and confidence which the Union had regained after the 1961-62 setback. The Nso' public in general and farmers in particular had come to associate the Union and the cooperative enterprise with fraud and mismanagement and to interpret the word "cooperative" to mean "cooperate and thief". It is, therefore, not surprising that the Manager of the Union declared in 1986 that it still "remains a duty for us to bring back the faith of our farmers to cooperatives⁴¹ a duty which the Union has since been trying to fulfil.

Attempted Solutions

Since 1981, the Union has taken several measures towards solving its problems. With the full backing of the Cameroon Government it dissolved its Board of Directors and dismissed important members of its Management in 1981, and drastically reduced its fulltime and seasonal workers thereafter. It also took legal action against some of its employees of the mismanagement period and abandoned many of its demonstration farms, one of which it handed over free of charge to WADA for it to be used in the training of ox-plough farmers. With the dissolution of WADA, which had engaged in the training of young farmers and extension staff in ox-plough agriculture, this farm has passed to a successor training scheme, the Promotion of Adapted Farming Systems Based on Animal Traction (PAFSAT), under West German aid auspices. The Union now retains only the self-supporting farms at Tobin and Jakiri. Furthermore, the Union sold off many of the items in its Supply Service at give-away prices and retained only farm tools, fertilizers, and chemicals which are crucial to coffee farmers. It also suspended work on the office complex on which it had allegedly already invested 38,000,000 francs CFA. With the aid of the forces of law and order, it has recovered 15,000,000 francs out of the 113,000,000 francs owed to it, although its attempts to recover the rest are being hampered by lengthy litigation. It has also reduced its debt and is paying for the farmers' produce more regularly than before.⁴²

Conclusion

The Union was the first large-scale attempt by the rural inhabitants of Nso' to raise and manage capital. It originated and developed in the same circumstances as the other unions in the Bamenda Grassfields with which it shared similar experiences. It offered the Nso' peasants an opportunity for training in economic and financial management and had a great potential for improving the economic and social wellbeing of its members and the society as a whole.

In general, it has achieved most of its objectives. But, in the process of doing so, it overstretched its resources and eroded its financial base. This, in turn, eroded the public trust and confidence which the Nso' people had in it and in the cooperative enterprise as a whole. Fortunately for it, it has recognized this and other problems and has been taking steps since 1981 to redress the situation.

But, a lot still has to be done in this direction. The Union and its Societies are in dire need of closer democratic supervision if fraud and mismanagement are to be checked. The role of the General Assemblies of the Union and its Societies should be redefined to include the supervision of the Boards of Directors and Managements. The decisions, projects, and expenditures of the Boards of Directors and Managements should be scrutinized and authorized by the General Assemblies before they are implemented. The activities of the Boards and Managements should be carefully monitored.

The problem of closer democratic supervision can be solved if compensation is paid for the service rendered. Since time is now money, the smaller coffee producers would be unlikely to attend General Assemblies in order to supervise the Union and its Societies unless paid 'expenses'. Such 'expenses' should of course be very modest—a day's unskilled agricultural wage equivalent—and should not be by 'share' but by individual so as to avert brokers who would purport to represent X shareholders and collect their 'expenses'. Moreover, if bonuses were distributed on the same day as the General Assemblies, people would of course turn up. The General Assemblies should also be advertized and should take place on 'Country Sundays' in some fixed rotation.

The Boards of Directors and the Executive Councils should be charged with the daily supervision of the Managements. In order to perform this function whole-time and fair-mindedly, the members of these Boards and Councils should become wage-earners which would enable them replace themselves by part-time labour on their own holdings, if any. The members

of these Boards and Councils should be elected triennially not on the basis of shares, which would give an undue influence to landowners of large tracts and apparatchiks, but of votes. Although people who become members of administrative bodies by votes are not famed for honesty and there is some danger too that a local salariat will take too much out of the kitty at the expense of services, it is hoped that democratic supervision, the new role assigned to the Boards of Directors and the Executive Councils vis-a-vis the Managements, and professional, regular surprise audits would take care of that.

The members of the Executive Councils should also be given further training in economic and financial management and the Managements put in the hands of people with previous farm management experience. Closer professional, regular surprise audits should replace the current inspectorate system in which the Cooperative Inspectors are well known and are, therefore, subject to local influence.

The duplication of functions should be eliminated and the marketing of produce put entirely in the hands of farmers. To this effect, the NPMB and the NWCA should both be abolished and their place taken by a single marketing organization in the Anglophone Provinces. As Dr. van der Laan has argued, the NPMB has failed to achieve the main goal for which it was created, the harmonization of the Anglophone and francophone systems of marketing produce⁴³, and there is no indication that it will succeed in doing so. Moreover, the apex organizations of the North west and South West Provinces have argued separately that the NPMB is a liability rather than an asset to them and have requested to be allowed to market their own produce in the world market.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the NPMB is a governmental organization, staffed with highly paid civil servants who enjoy unearned amenities at the expense of the farmers with whom they are hardly in touch and who are generally unsympathetic to and ignorant of the problems of farmers. Finally, the NPMB and the NWCA as well as the South west Farmers' Cooperative union (SOWEFCU) are virtually middlemen performing the same main function for the Unions, the marketing of produce. This duplication of function is not in the best interest of the Unions and their farmers. The role which these middlemen play can be performed equally well by a single organization of farmers. Such an organization should comprise well trained farmers with previous produce handling and marketing experience. They should be selected from the various Cooperatives in the North West and South west Provinces, in proportion to the economic viability of the Cooperatives. In order to compensate them for their training and enable them to pay for the cultivation of their own farms, they should be

put on a payroll. In this way, duplication of functions will be eliminated, redundant and expensive middlemen removed, and the business put in the hands of its owners who have more at stake in it.

Endnotes

1. I am grateful to Mrs E.M. Chilver and Dr H.L. van der Laan for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2. For a more elaborate discussion of the role of women in the economy of the Bamenda Grassfields, see Phyllis M. Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields* (London: H.M.S.O., 1952).

3. E.M. Chilver, 'Women Cultivators, Cows and Cash-Crops: Phyllis Kaberry's *Women of the Grassfields* revisited' (TS), Centre for Cross-Cultural Research on Women, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford (1986), pp.5-6.

4. There is no general agreement as to who introduced Arabica coffee to the Bamenda Grassfields and where exactly in the region. Wongibe Edwin Fon ascribes it to Reverend Father Stockman who is said to have introduced the crop in Mankon in the early 1930s. See Wongibe Edwin Fon 'The Consequences of the Activities of the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches in the North West Province of the United Republic of Cameroon 1903-1975' (Post Graduate Diploma thesis, University of Yaounde, 1983), pp.53-4. According to Dean Mahon, it was introduced to the region by a certain Chua chang at Santa in 1932. See Dean Mahon, 'A Short History of Cooperatives in the Northwest', *Agricultural Marketing in the North-West province*, ed. John van D. Lewis (PN-AAK-864, USAID, 1980), p.415. Yet, T.S. Jervis ascribes it to a returned migrant worker from a French plantation who is said to have introduced it at his home town in Bali in the 1930s. See Chilver, 'Women Cultivators, Cows and Cash-Crops', p.6. It is probable that each of these people introduced the crop to the various areas of the region independently at different times in the early 1930s. Whatever the case, the crop was successfully introduced to the region for three main reasons. First, it was introduced when the most important cash-crop, the kolanut, was attacked by a blight and people were looking for new sources of money in order to pay head tax, buy European goods, and finance their children's education. Second, the wartime Allied demand for raw materials from West

Africa as a whole also increased the economic potential of coffee and induced many more people to take to its cultivation. Finally, the involvement of the Catholic clergymen who were greatly respected and trusted presented coffee as an honest, beneficial crop deserving cultivation. The outcome was a mass cultivation of the crop.

5. See Chilver, 'Women Cultivators, Cows and Cash-Crops', p.10, for the gradual employment of land for coffee cultivation.

6. Mahon, 'A short History of Cooperatives', pp.415-416.

7. Isaiah Ndifon Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Area Cooperative Union Limited from Inception to Date (report prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture, 18 December 1986)' (Typewritten), p.1. Mahon and Tita give 7 October 1959 as the date of the registration. See Dean Mahon and S.P.D. Tita, 'The Nso Area cooperative union Ltd.', *study and Design Project of the cooperative sector: Thirteen Cooperative Case studies*, ed Dean Mahon (USAID, 1979), p.36.

8. See Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.36-38 for the general objectives of the NACU.

9. West Cameroon Government, *Nsaw Area Cooperative union Ltd. and Bamenda Co-operative Marketing Association Ltd.: Inquiry* (Buea: Government Printer, 1963), pp.10-15.

16. H. Laurens van der Laan, *Cameroon's Main Marketing Board:*

History and Scope of the ONCPB (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1987), pp.6-8.

17. Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.36.

18. Mahon, 'A Short History of Cooperatives', pp.420-421.

19. Interview with L.S. Fonka, John Tata, E. Nsambam, B.L. Nsawir, and L.Y. Ngala, MPs and individual members of either the Nso', Oku-Noni, or Nkambe Unions, Yaounde, 15 March 1988.

20. Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area cooperative Union', pp.39.

21. The number of representatives for each Society is determined by the economic viability of the Society.

22. Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Union', p.2-3.

23. Interview with Christopher Berinyuy Kun, President of the Nso' Union, Mbve', 22 April 1989.

24. Partially adapted from Cornelis A. Muntjewerff, 'The Producers' Price System and the Coffee and Cocoa Trade at the Village Level in West Africa', *Quarterly Journal of International Agriculture* 22: 2 (April-June 1983): 170, 177.

25. Computed from Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.44-46, 59; Interview with Kun, 22 April 1989.

26. H.L. van der Laan, *Cocoa and Coffee Buying in Cameroon: The Role of the Marketing Board in the South west and North west Provinces, 1978-1987* (Leiden African Studies Centre, 1988), p.15.

27. Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.44-45.

28. Van der Laan, *Cocoa and Coffee Buying*, p.9; Interview with Kun, 22 April 1989.

29. Computed from the various sales files of the Union.

30. Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.42-44; Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Union', p.2.

31. Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Union', p.2-4.

32. Ibid.; Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.45, 49-50.

33. Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.45-49; Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Union', p.2-4.; Peter Ndi Fonte, 'Nso Union President Appeals for Help', *Cameroon Tribune*, No.714, 9 June 1987, p.6.

34. In his December 1986 report to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Manager of the Union made it clear that he regarded this period as one of mismanagement. See Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Union', p.5. In their outburst of 1979, the Nso' students charged the staff of the Union with mismanagement and fraud. During the interviews which I conducted from 15 to 30 March, 19 to 31 July, 18 to 23 December 1987, and sporadically since 1988, the Nso' farmers and public left no doubts in my mind that they regarded this period as one of mismanagement and fraud. Some of the activities and undertakings of the Union confirmed this general view.

35. On 17 February 1988, an insider of the mismanagement period, whose name I am withholding, told me that the Giant Rice Mill cost about 49,000,000 francs CFA but the Manager's friend who acted as the middleman duped the Union, to the tune of 100,000,000 francs. On 22 April 1989, the current President of the Union informed me that the records show that the machine was paid for by FONADER for 50,000,000 francs in form of a loan to the Union. When the Shule Company of west Germany which sold the machine delivered it at Duala, the Manager of the Union borrowed another 50,000,000 francs, out of which 12,000,000 francs are said to have been used in transporting the machine from Duala to Nso' and the rest used for constructing a building and installing the machine in it. He stressed that despite the money said to have been spent on the installation of the machine, the machine is still uninstalled, and my observations at the site confirmed it. The Union's greatest concern now is to find a buyer for the machine since its capacity is far beyond the needs of its rice farmers.

36. Tamanjong, 'Brief Notes on Nso Union', p.5; Mahon and Tita, 'The Nso Area Cooperative Union', pp.46.

37. The insider of 17 February 1988 also informed me that the Manager of the mismanagement period consulted a Labour Inspector who approved of the move and thus made further consultation with his employers unnecessary. It should be noted that the Union has since taken steps to recover the money it lost through those increases.

43. Van der Laan, *Cocoa and Coffee Buying*, pp.1-36; van der Laan, *Cameroon's Main Marketing Board*, pp.1-15.

44. Nicodemus Ngong, 'N.W. Farmers to Go World Market in 1987:

Accuses NPMB of Double-dealing', *Cameroon Tribune*, No.618, 23 April 1986, p.8; "NPMB Begins Giant Projects in North West and South West," *Cameroon Tribune* No. 621, 14 May 1986, p.5.

References

Written Sources

Chilver, E.M. "Women cultivators, Cows and Cash-Crops: Phyllis Kaberry's *Women of the Grassfields* revisited." Centre for Cross-Cultural research on Women, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 1986. (Typewritten).

Fon, Wongibe Edwin. "The Consequences of the Activities of the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches in the North West Province of the united Republic of Cameroon 1903-1975." Maitrise memoir, University of Yaounde, 1983.

Mahon, Dean. "A Short History of Cooperatives in the Northwest," pp.415-431. In *Agricultural Marketing in the North-West Province*. Edited by John van D. Lewis. PN-AAK-864, USAID, 1980.

Mahon, Dean; and Tita, S.P.D. "The Nso Area Cooperative union Ltd," pp.35-62. In *study and Design Project of the Cooperative Sector: Thirteen Case Studies*. Edited by Dean Mahon. USAID, 1979.

Muntjewerff, Cornelis A. "The Producers' Price system and the Coffee and Cocoa Trade at the Village Level in West Africa." *Quarterly Journal of International Agriculture*, 22:2 (April-June 1983):163-178.

Ngong, Nicodemus. "N.W. Farmers to Go World Market in 1987: Accuses NPMB of Double-dealing." *Cameroon Tribune*, No.618, 23 April 1986, p.8.

"NPMB Begins Giant Projects in North West and South West." *Cameroon Tribune*, No.621, 14 May 1986, p.5.

Tamanjong, Isaiah Ndifon. "Brief Notes on Nso Area Cooperative Union Limited from Inception to Date (report prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture 18 December 1986)." (Typewritten).

Van der Laan, H. Laurens. *Cameroon's Main Marketing Board: History and scope of the ONCPB*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1987.

-----, *Cocoa and Coffee Buying in Cameroon: The Role of the Marketing Board in the South West and North West Provinces, 1978-1987*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1988.

West Cameroon Government. *Nsaw Area Cooperative Union Ltd. and Bamenda Co-operative Marketing Association Ltd.: Inquiry*. Buea: Government Printer, 1963.

Oral Sources

Fonka, Lawrence Shang. Member of National Assembly and Member of Nso' Area Cooperative Union. Yaounde. Interview, 15 March 1988.

Kun, Christopher Berinyuy. President, Nso' Area Cooperative Union. Mhve', Nso'. Interview, 22 April 1989.

Ngala, L.Y. Member of National Assembly and Member of Nkambe Cooperative Union. Yaounde. Interview, 15 March 1988.

Nsambam, Evaristus. Member of National Assembly and Member of Nso' Area Cooperative union. Yaounde. Interview, 15 March 1988.

Nsawir, B.L. Member of National Assembly and Member of Nso' Area cooperative union. Yaounde. Interview, 15 March 1988.

Tata, John. Member of National Assembly and Member of Oku-Noni Cooperative union. Yaounde. Interview, 15 March 1988.

Nso' Traditional Medical And Mortuary Concepts And Practices: A Description¹

B. CHEM-LANGHEE AND V.G. FANSO

Introduction

Traditional medicine is defined or used in this paper to include all practices utilized by people to foresee and prevent or treat physical, social, mental or spiritual diseases and to rehabilitate afflicted people within their cultural environment. It prepares the individual to respond properly to a particular situation and harmonizes his or her relationships with the spirits, the dead and the living. It englobes the individual in his totality: "his body and his soul, his personality and his social milieu, his life and existence both before birth and after death."² Its therapeutic practices range from the invocation of the spirits and ancestors through the expiation of wrong-doings to the application of drugs and herbs. It was the only indigenous medicine in Nso', Cameroon and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa before the introduction of Asian, Islamic or Western medicine to the area mainly during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

The colonial authorities, the missionaries and the authorities of the modern state have approached traditional medicine in Cameroon differently. The British authorities seldom intervened directly in the practice of traditional medicine. They were prepared to licence herbalists but looked askance at Missioninfluenced faith-healers. Rather, they hoped to encourage recourse to Western biomedicine by a scatter of modest Native Authority dispensaries as well as a few general hospitals, and by organizing touring medical teams, and the so-called 'Yaws Chindas', training some health-visitors and midwives, and imposing sanitary rules in built-up areas. The French authorities seem to have been more hostile to practices they perceived as dangerous to their more extensive public health programmes. Accordingly not only sorcery but the use of medicines outside the control of government - necessarily embracing traditional practitioners as well as fraudulent users of biomedical remedies was listed as an offence under the

indigenat, entailing summary punishment without trial.³ The Christian Missions, which supplied a major part of basic health care, from maternity clinics to leprosaria, varied in their attitudes. The association of some traditional therapies with divination and witch-detection put them all outside the pale for some. Thus, as late as the 1950s Catholic Christians in Nso' were threatened with expulsion from the Church if they dealt with traditional healers, all of whom tended to be lumped together by the Catholic authorities as 'witch-doctors.' In the face of this disapproval traditional medicine tended to go underground until it was given official recognition by the modern state. The Cameroon Government recognised its importance in the 1970s and 1980s when it took steps to develop and regulate traditional medicine and integrate it in the national health programme.⁴

In view of the attitude of the Cameroon Government towards traditional medicine and the voluminous literature on ethno-medicine and comparative medical systems, the Grassfields Working Group decided to study the ethnomedical systems of the Bamenda Grassfields during their December 1985 Bamenda Conference. This paper is a product of that decision. It attempts to show the connection between Nso' traditional medical and mortuary concepts and practices within the framework of Nso' perceptions of man and his relationship with society, the earth, the ancestors and God.

The Framework

Nso' traditional medical and mortuary concepts and practices are closely linked with Nso' concepts of man and his relationship with society, the earth, the ancestors and God. In the Nso' scheme of things, the concept of man generically includes both men and women and represents the highest value on earth. Everything on earth is made to serve man. Man's wellbeing and person are inviolable and should not be tampered with either by himself, by individual members of the society or by the society as a whole without justifiable cause as provided for by native law and custom. To do so is to invite the wrath of society, the earth, the ancestors and God, all of whom have the power of punishment and retribution. Although society as a whole is seen to have the power of retribution, it is, however, made up of individuals who are conceived of as either good or bad, wicked or kind, just or unjust. It also contains people who possess powerful dangerous or benevolent psychic powers and is governed by specific laws and customs. The individual is expected to respect these laws and customs whose contravention is punishable by God, the ancestors and the earth.

The earth, seen as the most important element of man's natural environment, is said to have ears, eyes and the power to punish but not to reward. Its punishment, it is believed, comes in the form of disease or death which is inflicted on all those who transgress the laws and customs of the land or society. The earth is also the "home" of the ancestors who are believed to have power over the living. They can punish those who wrong them and forgive those who have righted their wrong or atoned for their misdeeds in as much as they can plead to God on behalf of the living. God himself is seen as the Supreme Power and the Giver of Life. He is attributed only with good qualities and benevolent powers and is said to have good reason for allowing whatever happens to man.

Man is expected to relate to his society, to the land (earth) on which he was born and lives, to his ancestors and to God in a prescribed and specific manner. He is expected to respect the inviolability of the wellbeing and person of, the individual members of the society, including his own. He must obey the laws and customs of the society and land in which he was born and in which he lives. The will of his ancestors must always be scrupulously respected and he is obligated to constantly keep in touch with them through sacrifices or good works to those for whom they would have been responsible if they were still alive. Man is also expected to obey the laws of God, which are equivalent to the laws and customs of the land, and to accept whatever God gives him happily. Failure to do all this is punishable by society, by the earth, by the ancestors or by God. This punishment can take the form of callous and disrespectful treatment of the individual by other members of his society, during his lifetime or after death. It can also take the form of disease, illness or death. Nevertheless, the Nso' fully subscribe to the concept of natural causes for some diseases, illnesses and death.

Medical Concepts and Practice Concepts

According to the Nso', disease is anything which causes death or mental, physical and spiritual illness, and is seen as both natural and unnatural. Natural illnesses include those which result from natural causes such as bad eating and sleeping habits, mental and physical overstrain and simple accidents. Unnatural illnesses are those which are perceived to be the work (or result) of angry spirits and ancestors, witchcraft, and outright wickedness (poisoning), or a retribution for wrongdoings and serious breaches of tradition or of the laws of the land. Natural illnesses are expected to respond to treatment within a very short time whereas unnatural illnesses are said to take much longer to treat because their causes must first be divined and

controlled before the actual treatment of the disease begins. From the outset, illness is assumed to be natural until its resistance to treatment subsequently proves otherwise. When the patient does not respond to normal treatment, the illness is assumed to be unnatural and its cause is divined and controlled before treatment is continued.

Despite this apparent dichotomy, the Nso' still associate certain diseases with specific causes. Barrenness is both the work of creation and a result of premature sexual intercourse, witchcraft, menopause, abnormal menses, the anger of the ancestors and unfulfilled obligations. Oedema is said to result from venereal diseases especially gonorrhoea, inadequate sperm production and superfluous fat in the body. Insanity is invariably associated with witchcraft, superfluous intelligence, brain damage and extreme anger and hatred. Leprosy is said to be a product of sexual intercourse during menstruation, witchcraft and *njo nsay*, that is an affliction for an abominable offence against the earth or against the laws of the land. Nightmares are said to result either from witchcraft or provocative fiddling with sacred objects. Dropsy is either a *njo nsay* affliction or a product of a broken oath or of pollution from circumstances involving suicide. Crossing over or going beyond *shin* lines "medicine barriers" - is associated with elephantiasis and painful menses. Serious hunting accidents are invariably associated either with uncontrolled sexual intercourse with wives or girlfriends of hunting partners, or cheating in previous hunts, with unpaid debts, anger, hunting on sacred or forbidden grounds, killing of animals with magical powers and failure to perform required rituals and sacrifices. Epidemics such as smallpox and influenza are said to result from witchcraft.

Besides these associations, there are explanations provided exclusively by the traditional healers which, in our opinion, reflect modern biological and physiological influences and are, therefore, neo-traditional. Thus epidemics are said to be airborne and foreign and are occasionally brought to Nso' by travellers and Nso' long-distance traders. Likewise, according to Damasius Tatah, barrenness and infertility in women can result from two causes. First, if a young girl developing breasts experiences her first menses when she has a cough, she can become barren or infertile. According to this explanation, a woman, like a man, has testicles located just above her vagina. When a young girl coughs during her menses, these testicles are raised to an undesirable point and her menses become abnormal. Then something in form of cobwebs settles at the point where the semen from the man unites with the sucking liquid of the woman and thus blocks pregnancy. In the second case, a girl who experiences an attack of measles at a much later age than usual is likely to become barren or infertile for reasons we could not discover. Late

measles can also raise the testicles of a man to an undesirable point and thus obstruct erection and sexual intercourse. This explanation claims that there is no such thing as natural barrenness or infertility and that good traditional medicine can always reverse barrenness and infertility in a woman; it had nothing to say about reversing infertility in a man.

With regard to pregnancy, our special informant, Damasius Tatab claimed that, contrary to popular opinion, it is the liquid in the joints of the man rather than the sperm which causes pregnancy. According to this explanation, this liquid leaves the joints of a man and collects in the man's testicles, during which process the man sweats. During sexual intercourse, this liquid and the sperm are ejaculated at the same time into the vagina. The liquid egg of the woman then receives both but sucks only the liquid from the man's joints to form the child. That is how children come to inherit their parents' features.⁶ Pregnant women who refrain from sexual intercourse for three months or more run the risk of premature birth, of giving birth to sickly babies, (of difficult deliveries. Likewise, pregnant women who continue to have sexual intercourse with more than one man are likely to contract "bad blood" which can retard the growth of the embryo and prolong delivery.

The malfunctioning of some parts of the body is also associated with specific diseases. The head is said to contain the "box" which holds the brain and consciousness. If this "box" is overheated, influenced by alcohol, fatigued from overwork or confused, headache occurs. A person can become insane if the brain is functioning badly since the brain controls all the activities of the body. As the lungs promote breathing, colds and coughs develop from the malfunctioning of the lungs. When a person with an abnormally big bile is frightened, he develops "catarrh of the backbone" which weakens a person to the point at which he cannot raise a limb. An abnormally big bile is also believed to cause pneumonia, piles and, under the influence of alcohol, extreme anger and tension. Epilepsy and insanity can result, it is said, if the backbone, said to be the home of intelligence and producer of the urge for sex in both sexes, is hurt.

Birth-signs are also important in Nso' traditional medical concepts. They are diagnosed only after birth. Children from a multiple birth and those born with clenched hands (said to contain their gifts from God) or with cauls or umbilical-like cords across their shoulders and chests said to be a sign of royalty are called *won nyuy*, literally "God's children." As *won nyuy*, they are special children deserving special care and treatment. They are given special names in a special naming ritual. They are said to be endowed with healing powers and special psychic powers for self-protection, retribution and the

detection and prevention of evil. They are greatly loved, admired and accorded special privileges and a high social status in society.⁷ A second category of special children includes those children born feet first or with more than five fingers or toes, with thumb in the mouth, visible or deformed teeth, curled toes and cauls or umbilical-like cords round the neck.⁸ They are associated with witchcraft and evil and are generally feared. Special children in both categories require the medical attention of traditional healers who take steps to exorcise or control the witchcraft and evil tendencies of those in the second category as soon as they are born.

Practices

A traditional healer in Nso' is called *nggaa shiv* (pl. *anggae shiv*, lit. man of medicine) or, more recently, *taadom*, after the famous, legendary and mysterious traditional healer of Mbuluv village, called Taadom, who died in the 1940s.⁹ But the traditional healers readily call themselves medicine-men or native doctors. While a few regard themselves as soothsayers, others describe themselves as "God's Messengers." They are aware of one another's specialties and readily refer cases they cannot treat to the appropriate quarters.

Nso' traditional healers observably fall into three categories.

There are those who inherited their medical knowledge through training by their parents or relatives. These begin their training during their childhood and specialize in the treatment of a few diseases. Then there are those who obtained their medical knowledge through training with many different traditional healers. These begin training in their adulthood and usually treat a large number of diseases. The third category consists of those whose medical knowledge is said to be "a gift from God... a gift they could have received at any age. sometimes they are born with their gift in their clenched hands and sometimes God gives it to them at any age beginning from childhood in the world of spirits after their alleged temporary physical absence from this world during which time they are said to be 'stolen by God.'" While some traditional healers in this last category specialize in the treatment of only a few diseases, others treat a large variety of conditions and diseases.

In their healing process, traditional healers make use of: natural substances such as castor, palm and kernel oils, palm wine, honey, limestone, various potions, leaves, seeds, eggs, salt, tree bark and animal skins, spines and bones; man-made articles or artifacts, namely, razors, spears, hoes, knives, mats, baskets and clay pots and dishes; and a repertoire special knowledge and practices known to traditional healers such as particular

rituals, divination, oracles, sacrifices, counselling, fortune-telling, soothsaying and incantations. All these are used in various combinations depending on the illness and perceived cause of the disease. Drugs are prepared and used mainly in the form of concoctions, mashings and powder, although in some cases leaves, pieces of wood, barks of trees, wild fruits, roots and tubers are eaten directly. The colour of a concoction is important in so far as it indicates that the drug is ready for use.

Scabies, rashes, filaria and other skin diseases, simple sprains, rheumatism, backache, pneumonia, general body pains and snake and insect bites are treated generally with mash and powder drugs incised into the body or bloodstream and by applying ointment, singly or in any combination. Some healers even combine any of these with other concoctions. Dislocations, fractures and severe sprains are treated with ointment, splints and plasters which involve the use of animal bones. Infertility is treated with a combination of sacrifice, expiation, counselling, concoctions, mashings and edible leaves, roots and tubers. Insanity is attacked with a combination of drugs, divination and propitiation. Epidemics are contained through isolation, during which time previously affected persons said to have developed immunity to the disease take food, water, castor and kernel oils and *nseng*, a powerful lotion made out of castor oil, the teeth and heads of poisonous creatures and some grasses, roots, seeds and leaves, to the victims to eat, drink or rub on their bodies. Although almost every disease is subject to divination, only sleeplessness, kleptomania, delayed delivery, paleness, anger and bed-wetting are treated solely by a combination of divination, expiation and sacrifice. Insanity, blindness, elephantiasis, leprosy, oedema or dropsy combine divination, expiation, sacrifice and drugs in their treatment. The treatment of incestuousness, regarded as an abominable disease, requires rituals, sacrifice and the taking of an oath.¹¹

The naming ritual for special children, involves the use of a large array of items: salt, palm oil, a local incense, a *sho'* or long-necked gourd containing fresh palm wine into which is dipped a *kikeng* or lily-like stem (a symbol of royal authority, peace and calm), cowries, *kinwooy* (a slimy pollution-removing herbal concoction of palm wine or water), pounded cocoyams, mashed drugs and a gourd rattler. Special children in the desired category are given special names which denote their royalty and godliness. In another ritual, their gifts are received in new, white fibre bags into which they put their clenched hands and open them to deposit and retain their gifts. On the other hand, in rituals involving the use of black fowls, eggs and cups of palm wine, the witchcraft and evil tendencies of special children in the undesired category are exorcised or controlled near the beds on which the children were born.

The children are held upside down over the bed, the fowls are killed in sacrifice and the eggs are cracked and poured on the forehead of the children. Thus while special children in the desired category are welcomed with honours, those in the undesired category are treated for their undesired tendencies or illnesses.

Illnesses which at first sight appear natural are subject to divination once they do not respond to treatment. But some diseases described as "difficult" require divination from the outset since such afflictions are presumed *a priori* to be due to mystical forces.¹² These include insanity, sleeplessness, bleeding during pregnancy, prolonged delivery, dropsy, leprosy, oedema and constant illhealth. Many of these illnesses or conditions take long to cure. Once their causes are divined, appropriate steps are taken to control, appease or destroy the mystical forces behind them. Thus, if it is divined that an insane person is being controlled by mystical forces in a mysterious other place, or that his mind is occupied by spirits because of a ritual he had failed to perform, the healer or recognised sorcerer will request his family members to perform a ritual on his behalf and then take steps to recover him from the other place or to exorcise the evil spirits from him.

Although almost all the Nso' traditional healers practice divination, none of them was willing to divulge their secrets to us. However, they indicated that in their divination they employ eggs, wild garden eggs, broken glasses, porcupine quills, pebbles, kolanut peel, spiders, water in a bowl, the Koran and fu--an assorted collection of articles each of which is associated with a particular event, good or bad.

With regard to cultivation of herbs or special buildings, very few Nso' traditional healers have medical botanic gardens of their own or healing homes reserved for patients. They collect their herbs from a variety of places and treat their patients in their living rooms or in one-room structures attached to their houses reserved for that purpose. Although the influence of western and Islamic medicine is to be detected here and there, the majority of the Nso' traditional healers are not influenced by foreign medicine or medical practices.¹³ However, many of them possess first-aid boxes containing iodine, aspirin, nivaquine and bandages which they use for simple ailments without disguising them as part of, or combining them with, traditional drugs. They feel very strongly that patients come to them nowadays only after modern medicine has failed to cure them except in cases of simple and perceived natural illnesses, a feeling that was supported to some extent by our lay informants. Further exceptions, they say, are to be found in the case of insanity, possession by evil spirits, hallucination, painful spleen, elephantiasis, ascites and diseases relating to witchcraft which are

brought to them from the outset because it is believed these can be cured only by traditional medicine. They submit readily that cases involving surgery, blood transfusion, vaccination, or amputation, and difficult delivery, early leprosy diagnosis and heart and liver problems belong properly to modern medicine.

With regard to payment, most Nso' traditional healers charge a fowl and a calabash of palm wine for a complete treatment of each simple illness. In the case of more complex illnesses, these items may be doubled but they are hardly ever tripled. However, in very severe cases such as ascites, fainting, epilepsy, leprosy and insanity, a goat or two may be added to the list. Sometimes native knife, spear, basket, salt, camwood, castor, palm and kernel oils and firewood, singly or in combination, form part of the payment. Many of the traditional healers who obtained their medical knowledge through training have gone commercial in the urban areas and are exacting high payments in cash. On the other hand, those whose medical knowledge is "a gift from God" are rural-based and shun payment in cash, although they happily receive voluntary gifts made in appreciation long after treatment has ended. They see themselves mainly as instruments which God uses to guide man, to alleviate man's suffering and to prevent death.

Mortuary Concepts and Practices

Concepts

According to the Nso', death is the end to life. It occurs when the soul (breath) leaves the body and the heart and lungs cease to function. Then the body begins to lose heat and to undergo *rigor mortis* while the eyeballs begin to turn white. When this happens, steps are taken to close the eyes and mouth of the deceased and to straighten his arms, hands and legs and to put his feet in position. After that the corpse, which in the past was washed, covered with mats and buried as soon as the death occurred, is washed, clothed, covered with a blanket, loincloth or bedspread and buried one or more days after the death occurs.

Death is perceived from a number of angles which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There are natural and unnatural deaths. Natural deaths are those which result from natural illnesses which are not caused by poisoning or supernatural forces; there is no suspicion in such cases. Unnatural deaths are those which result from poisoning or from illnesses which have been divined as having been caused by supernatural forces. Deaths are also said to be good or bad. Good deaths are those which relieve

their victims of pain and suffering or of old age and were therefore desired. In another sense, they are deaths which give the dying the opportunity to state their wills properly and bid farewell to their family members who do likewise to the dying. Bad deaths are those for which the victims are themselves held responsible and are said to bring shame and misfortune to the family. Prominent among such deaths are those which result from suicide, drowning, ascites and lightning. There are also shocking and unshocking deaths. Shocking deaths are those which occur to young people, ranging from children to adults who have not yet had grandchildren. Such deaths are not expected. Deaths that are not shocking are those of people who have already had grandchildren. Such deaths are expected at any time and are handled and mourned with special respect.

Practices

The different angles from which deaths are viewed suggest that deaths are not handled in a uniform manner. Whereas bad deaths and those of children are not mourned, all other deaths are mourned. The mourning period for deaths which are mourned is between 5 days and 12 Nso' eight-day weeks, depending on the age and status of the deceased. In general, people between 21 and 50 years are mourned for 5 days while those above 50 years and title holders are mourned for 7 days. On the other hand, the *Fon* or King who, by definition, has always been above 50 years is mourned for 12 weeks.

Whereas the corpses from bad deaths are contemptuously buried, those from the rest of the deaths are properly treated and buried. The corpse from a bad death is buried where it was found or far away in the bush or forest if the death occurs in the compound. When the grave is dug, the corpse is thrown or pushed into it in the state in which it was found. Soil is then thrown into the grave and stamped down unceremoniously several times until the grave is completely filled in. After that, the *kifan* ritual is performed. During this ritual, the officiating "medicine-man" invokes the earth, God and ancestors of the affected family and requests them to "blow away the bad wind" which is said to have brought about the misfortune of a bad death and to remove the pollution such a death is said to have caused. After that, those who took part in the burial and even those who merely saw the corpse are invited to eat a mixture of human feces, oil and other natural substances to atone for having come in contact with a bad death and to cleanse themselves of the pollution caused by that contact.

With regard to the other deaths, the graves are dug and properly lined up with banana leaves and mats which have been replaced by coffins nowadays. The corpse is then washed, anointed and dressed neatly in the deceased's best clothes before being carefully laid in a niche on one wall of the grave to avoid soil touching it. The modern coffin has made this niche unnecessary. Once the corpse is properly laid in the grave, the soil is stamped down unceremoniously in the case of children and adults without grandchildren and with pomp, jubilation, dancing and singing in the case of both the childless aged and those who already have grandchildren. When burial ends, official mourning begins.

The Nso' mourn the dead because someone dear to them has been lost and in order to assure the dead that his or her presence was desired, which helps to explain why those who are held to be responsible for their own deaths are not mourned. During official mourning in the past, titled family members wore old white fibre or torn caps while untitled persons went bareheaded and women wore white fibre belts. In addition, men wore tattered clothing while women wore banana leaves. No one was allowed to bathe. When official mourning ended, death was "washed away" in a ritual called '*su kpu*,' which is said to remove the pollution caused by death and permits the mourners to shave their heads clean to indicate that all was over and that they could resume their normal way of life.

Part of this custom has since been modified. Nowadays, titled family members wear old rather than torn or white fibre caps. In place of white fibre belts and banana leaves, women now wear tattered clothes. During the colonial period, the closest family' members of the deceased, led by church adherents, adopted the European habit of wearing black clothes to indicate mourning, which they did for a year after official mourning ended. Today, the wearing of white clothes for the same purpose is gradually replacing that of black clothes, which thus resembles the traditional white fibre caps and belts. This custom however differs greatly from that of national deaths--those of the *Fon* and his Queen-Mother. Discussion of these warrants a separate paper.

Conclusion

Nso' traditional medical and mortuary concepts and practices are very closely interconnected. The dichotomy between natural and unnatural diseases or illnesses not only influences the approach to the treatment of particular afflictions but also molds mortuary concepts and practices. Thus

there are natural causes to natural diseases or illnesses which may lead to natural deaths that are handled with respect. Conversely, there are unnatural causes to unnatural diseases or illnesses which may lead to unnatural deaths which are treated callously and contemptuously. The causes of unnatural diseases or illnesses have to be divined and their treatment preceded by sacrifice, propitiation or restitution and, should the illness end in death, a ritual of cleansing and atonement is performed.

Nso' traditional medical and mortuary concepts and practices also have a lot to do with Nso' perceptions of man and his relationship to his society, the earth, the ancestors and God. Unnatural diseases and illnesses and unnatural deaths are said to be the work of bad and wicked people, the result of the contravention of the laws and customs of the land, a product of the anger of the ancestors who have been disobeyed or neglected, or simply viewed as retribution from God. Thus, attempts are made to exorcise or control the witchcraft and evil tendencies of special children in the undesired category as soon as they are born, offences against the earth are expiated, sacrifices are performed to the ancestors and God, and rituals are performed after bad deaths. Natural causes produce natural diseases or illnesses which may lead to' natural deaths that are respectfully handled because God alone knows why he has allowed them to happen.

Perhaps more important is the soothing and moral aspect of Nso' traditional medical and mortuary concepts and practices. The sacrifices performed to the ancestors and God, the expiation of the earth through ritual and the cleansing and atonement ritual performed after bad deaths console the living, reconcile them with the otherworld, and assure them of their respected position in society, thus removing or obviating the need for psychiatrists. "The fear of contracting "bad" diseases associated with the contravention of native laws and customs or of the laws of the society and land and the fear of being treated callously and contemptuously after death mold the individual morally and not only induce him to respect the laws and customs of his society and land but also integrate him in his society and harmonize him with his natural environment. By constantly keeping in touch with the ancestors, the living combine the past with the present to have a comprehensive view of the world and the future.

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise indicated this study, which was partially funded by the University of Yaounde, is based on interviews we have been sporadically

conducting in Nso' since 1986. Our most useful informants to whom we are very grateful include: Amadu Ngong of Faa NgkarkuYi Amadu wirdzem of Ngkari Andrew Wirdzem of Tsenlum Nse'i Christopher M. Ndze of Jakirii Damasius Tatah of Kitiwumi Faay Mbiame of Mbiame *Buni* Faay Sha' of Sha' NjavnyuYi George Bandin of Ngkar; George Mengnjo of Ngkar; Isa wirsar of Nse'; Justin *Fonba* of Nggomrin; Lavsamba Lukong Ngoran of Meliim, Nicodemus Take of Jotin; Paul Dinayen of Ngkar; Peter Kongla of Nse'; Robert Lawong of Kinsenjam; Sheey Elias Nkavnin of Nseymbang; Sheey Kpuli of Kimbo'i Sheey Nicholas of Ngkari Sheey woo Sarway of Ngkar; Sheey woo Vinggom of Yer; Usifu Manjo of Jakiri; Veronica Maika of Meliimi wirba Fai Amadu of Kimari wirbir Cecilia of MensaYi and Yaa Helena of Kikay Kom. We are also grateful to Dr Felix Landze Maiamo, Elias Kongnso Kun, Alex Tume Bi'fon and George Bandin who conducted some interviews for us, and to Mrs E.M. Chilver and Professor Miriam Goheen who read an earlier draft and suggested improvements on it.

2. Dan. N. Lantum, *Traditional Medicine-men of Cameroon: The Case of Bui Division* (Yaounde: University of Yaounde, 1985), pp.21, 24.

3. See Decree of 8 August 1924 and Arête of 4 October 1924 in *Journal Officiel* du Cameroun 107 (15 October 1924).

4. See Cameroon Government Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Development Plans, 1976-1981 and 1981-1986 respectively.

5. See, for example: the recent special issues of the Journal *social science and Medicine*: Vol.12, No.2B, *Theoretical Foundations for the comparative study of Medical systems*, 1978, pp.65-138; Vol.12, No.3B, *Sex, culture and Illness*, eds. H.B.M. Murphy, E. Roskies and E.D. Wittkower, 1978, pp.139-234; Vol.13: No.1, *Parallel Medical systems: Papers from a Workshop on "The Healing Process"*, ed. Arthur S. Bubel with the assistance of Carolyn Sargent, 1979, pp.1-84; Vol.13B, No.2, *The Transcultural perspective in Health and Illness*, ed. Hazel Weidman, 1979, pp.85-168; Vol.13B, No.4, *The social History of Disease and Medicine in Africa*, eds. John M. Janzen and Steven Feierman, 1979, pp.239-356; Vol.13C, No.2, *Selected Issues in Health policies in Africa and Latin America*, ed. Tom Bossert and Vol.14B, No.4, *Medical Pluralism*, ed. Charles Leslie, 1980, pp.191-296. See also: G. Chavunduka, *Traditional Healers and the Shona Patient*, Salisbury, Mambo Press, 1978; R.H. Bannerman, "Round Table: Traditional medicine in modern health care," *World Health Forum* 3:1 (1982): 8-26; Michael Gelfand, *Medicine and custom in Africa*, London, 1964; and

Arthur Kleinman, *Patients c Healers in the Context of culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980. with specific reference to Cameroon, SE Paul Gebauer, *spider Divination in the Cameroons*, Milwaukee, The North American Press, 1964; Rosemarie Leiderer, *La médecine traditionnelle chez les Bekpak (Bafia)* du Cameroun, Vols.I and II, 1982; and Dan N. Lantum, *Traditional Medicine-men of Cameroon: The Case of Bui Division*, Yaounde, The University of Yaounde, 1985.

6. The general belief in Nso' is that children derive flesh and blood from both parents. See Phyllis M. Kaberry, "Witchcraft of the Sun: Incest in Nso," in *Man in Africa*, eds. Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), p.188. In the Tikar Chiefdom of Ngambe to the east of Nso', the bone of a man is believed to produce the sperms which a man transmits to his offspring and the man's sperms are said to contribute to the growth of the child's bones, teeth, marrow, brain and heart while the woman's menses which ceases to flow during pregnancy is said to contribute to the growth of the skin, blood, flesh and most of the organs. See David Price, "Descent, Clans and Territorial Organization in the Tikar Chiefdom of Ngambe, Cameroon," *Zeitschrift fUr Ethnologie*, 112: 1 (1987): 85.

7. See also B.T. Sakah, "Nso Magico-Religious Practices," *Abbia*, 2 (1963): 67-68, and the recent symposium of the Kaberry Research Centre, *Rites of Passage and Incorporation in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon*, vol. 1, Bamenda, 1993.

8. In Bangwa, "a child delivered by breech, with a caul round its neck, with six fingers--any child in fact who exhibits physical or, later, psychological abnormalities" is treated as a special child. See Robert Brain, "Friends and Twins in Bangwa," in *Man in Africa*, p.217.

9. It is alleged that he was seen moving towards Nkambe at the same time that he was being buried at Mbuluv.

10. Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, one is said to become a healer by inheriting the gift from a deceased member of the family, acquiring the knowledge through the guidance of an unknown spirit "after living in the river bed or pool" for several days, or serving apprenticeship and receiving some form of formal medical instruction. See G. Chavunduka, *Traditional Healers and the Shona Patient* (Salisbury: Mambo Press, 1978), p.19.

11. For an elaborate discussion of incest in Nso', see Kaberry, "Witchcraft," pp.177-197.

12. In the Lugbara society of Uganda, oracles or diviners are consulted to discover the mystical causes of the disease and the propitiation to be made in cases where the sicknesses were not epidemics or venereal diseases, but regarded as the mystical action of the dead, the work of spirits, or a result of witchcraft or sorcery. See John Middleton, "Oracles and Divination among the Lugbara," in *Man in Africa*, pp.263-264.

13. Some of them are, however, involved in the dangerous practice of secretly grinding tablets reputed to have powerful healing effects, bought cheaply' from hawkers along the streets, and mixing them with their charcoal-coloured drugs.

Death, Afterlife And Funerary Rituals In Nso': Practice And Belief In A Changing Society

JOSEPH BANADZEM

Introduction

We start with a question. Given some 80 years of Christian activity and an increasing Moslem presence over the same period, can authentic Nso' concepts concerning death and the afterlife be identified?

We must take account, too, of other influences from the rest of Cameroon, indeed from the rest of Africa which may have affected some areas of belief and practice.¹ So is the task of identifying the particularly Nso' component in them both hopeless and anachronistic? I have been encouraged to pursue this quest by three things. The first is the tendency of Nso' Christians—and they are not the only ones in Africa—to reject incorporation in a “World system” which is felt to discourage parts of their culture which they value and which they do not find incompatible with their faith. The second is the existence of some written sources on the topic. These start with Father Emonts' observations in the period 1912-15 and continue in some scattered observations by British observers, published and unpublished, in the colonial period and after. More recent works by Nso' scholars, including one from a theological viewpoint, have been of special value. Finally, my own observations have laid to rest my apprehension that the rapid changes of the last decades had destroyed older attitudes; many traditional practices still survive and can be witnessed by research workers prepared to walk, wait and watch.

Death, the afterlife, and the significance of funerary rituals provoked metaphysical speculation among some of my informants but were not conjoined to any elaborate cosmology or story of creation. A divine being, *Nyiny*, had created and animated the earth and endowed it with powers; birth, life and death were part of a providential order, and intimately linked. Life, attributed to *Nyiny*, had well defined stages according to age and gender, marked by rituals or symbolic performances. For example, birth was closely

followed by the burial of the infant's navel-cord, *ntong wan*, on each side of a house entrance, right for boys and left for girls, each covered by a small stone (*kifin*), a practice in the secondary (memorial) burials we shall describe. Death was expected, and even welcomed, when the stages of life had been accomplished.

Death

Death was the stage before the afterlife. Its inevitability is made clear in Nso' proper names, which are often made up of the key words of a longer phrase. Here are some: *Wiyghan* (lit. time has come); *Ki'dẕee* (lit. constant expectations); *Go'la* (lit. who can remain?); *Mbiybee* (lit. where is the elder?); *Kpuudẕeka* (lit. death is nothing); *Nsaydẕedẕee* (lit. the earth is only a path). These are names which embody the idea of people considering death as a normal stage of life and even the idea of its being a desired phase in a person's existence.

A fulfilled life, with all its phases completed, made death in old age acceptable since it led to *mbor la'*, the homestead of peacefulness, which was how the afterlife was envisioned, and, indeed, longed for in old age. But some deaths were either acceptable or suspect, depending on the age and social rank of the deceased. Any person holding responsibility or of a relatively young age was never admitted to have had a normal death. Such deaths were Subsequently thought to derive from envy. A special vocabulary, to describe unacceptable death, was in use. Thus the verbs *shaa* (lit. 'to pass away') and *forsin*, (lit. 'to destroy'), were used to describe miscarriage and death in infancy, respectively.

The terms *tinen* or *shersin* (lit. 'be broken' for both words), were used to describe death in adolescence. There was an implication of untimely loss or destruction in all these expressions. On the other hand, the term *boy* or relief, was used when death occurred in old age or after a long illness or suffering.

Types of Death

Normal Death

Death, the passage to the otherworld, was, in some circumstances, ordained by God, and was regarded as a normal event. The illness which preceded it, as a rule, was, with some exceptions held to be characteristic of that passage. An illness in old age was a call from God to join the ancestors in *mbor la'*. But such an illness should not be accompanied by severe suffering

or physical or mental abnormalities and should allow a person to go through the rite of dying in its most noble and elaborate form.

As the sick person felt his last hour approach, his kinsfolk and friends gathered by his bedside to listen to and look after him. An individual who had no dispute with anybody, either within his family or outside it, who spoke giving clear advice and instructions to those present--called *ntir kpu* or advice of death--one whose final illness was brief and not marked by suffering or physical abnormality, was held to have been called to his ancestors by God, and to have died a good death. Before his death, he blessed those around him with water by sprinkling it over them, while giving his last advice. Were he a nobleman or man of responsibilities in society, he was believed to go straight into the world of the ancestors and even to have an honourable seat among them.

Unacceptable Death

If a person died in adolescence or when relatively young, even if in other respects he had died a good death and with no adverse bodily signs, his death was classed as unacceptable and raised doubts about its cause. Such deaths frequently called for the services of a diviner (*nggaa nggam*) to determine their cause. They did not qualify for most of the mourning rites a mature person's death would elicit. The mood in the home of the dead person was one of despairing grief. Because of the relative youth of the deceased or the short time a person would have exercised office, most of his kin saw and talked of their deaths as a betrayal of hopes bestowed upon them. The Nso' described such deaths as *kpuu yikir e woo dzene* (lit. 'death eating with dirty hands'). Quite often, such deaths were attributed to witchcraft (*virim*) or some misfortune which could have been caused by relatives or even by some action by the deceased. Indeed, the deceased or his parents could have innocently transgressed some laws of the land or the earth, or could have stepped across some protective medicines—shiv—and then were "caught", this causing their untimely death. But even though the cause of death might be the witchcraft of others or some culpable act, the victim's moral status was unaffected; he had died a good death and normal burial rites followed.

Bad Death

As we saw, death was not an acceptable event when it occurred in youth or in the prime of life, when it was put down to occult forces, the victim being blameless. We turn now to "bad deaths" (*kpu ye bii*) held to arise from

the deceased's own transgression and associations or the incursions of dangerous forces. Into this class fell sudden deaths or deaths from accidents, in particular hunting accidents, drowning and falling headlong into a ravine. Some explanations were offered for these deaths: hunting accidents, for instance, were ascribed to killing pregnant animals, offending the matrilineage ancestors, or committing adultery, especially with a hunting partner's wife. Other deaths might be due to trespassing upon places occupied by *anyuy* (gods). As for falling down a cliff, this was at times attributed to being 'caught' at a witch-market: it is also how corpses of executed persons were supposedly disposed of in the past. Another explanation for accidental deaths was that they were executions by the avenging earth or the ancestors. Common to all, however, was the idea that unexplained violent death was polluting. Suicide was, without question, a 'bad death'. Strange events or physical abnormalities at death—a swollen belly (*kum*), an issue of blood from eyes, ears or other orifices, the falling of a corpse off the bed on which it lay, or the bed's sudden collapse—also caused the death to be classified as a 'bad death'. Deaths from suicide or accompanied by the signs mentioned were usually attributed to the possession of witchcraft (*virim*) by the deceased or to his entrapment during a journey to the world of witches (*du kwa' sam*) and refusal to satisfy the demands of members of an association of cannibal witches. Other causes of 'bad deaths' were considered to be the result of *njo nsay*, actions eliciting the judgement of the earth. Among these were adultery with a Fon's wife while continuing to visit the palace, secret murder, acts of incendiarism in peacetime, breach of a solemn covenant (*kili*), causing abortion, and destructive actions due to envious spite (*kighe*). There were other acts against tradition or accepted norms of behaviour—such as beating one's parents, stealing property or crops protected by 'medicine' (*shin*) and, especially, false appeals to the earth—a powerful arbitrator—which were visited by the signs of 'bad death'.

According to my observations most of such deaths were nowadays being increasingly classified as 'bad deaths'. Nso' informants would say of many such deaths that 'the earth had cut him' (*nsay koo wun*) or that the dead man himself knew of its cause. In other words, it was believed that the deceased was a witch who could not fulfil his agreement to provide victims and had to commit suicide in self-sacrifice, or who knew he had transgressed. There was a great demand for diviners to determine causes of 'bad death'. These, as might be expected, found plausible reasons for them.

Signs of Death

Some persons were held to have difficulty in dying—the term is *kpunteng* (lit. not easy to die). Constant blinking demanded attention, and closing the eyelids so that the eyes did not remain open with the whites only showing, was called for. As will be seen below, when we deal with the rites of washing the corpse, this action was meant to maintain the corpse in an honourable condition. However there were also some beliefs concerning the significance of open eyes in dead persons. If proper care was not taken of the dying person and his eyes were left turned backwards, the *angkefa* (the dead) would not find a way to *mbor la'* but return to worry the living.

Another sign of approaching death was a sudden lucidity of thought (*viyii*), which enabled *ntir kpu* to be expressed. In some cases, at the crisis of their illness, a dying person might suddenly eat heartily or ask for something in particular—food, drink or a particular person. Experienced persons quickly diagnosed this-symptom as *viyikir ve kpu* (lit. last meal), with death imminent.

This was preceded by last words and followed by a cessation of breath, failure of heart-beat, and gradual stiffening, when the passage from one life to the next was held to have taken place. If there was nothing indicating an abnormality or bad death, calling for subsequent rites, the death was announced to relatives, the village and the whole community pending death rites.

Death Rites: The Preparation of the Body

The first thing done to the body of the dead person was to take appropriate measures to maintain it in an honourable state. The mouth and eyes were closed. Some informants said that some hair was cut off from the deceased person's head to prevent his spirit from coming back to harass the living.² The next vital rite was the washing of the corpse. This rite was carried out by the married daughters of the dead person, or *nggon se juu*, and by the women of the household. (The analogy with other phases of life, namely birth rituals, where the new born baby and mother were both washed after delivery, and nuptial ceremonies when washing the bride was an essential event, is evident in this rite.) Informants gave a variety of reasons for this rite. It would appear that the principal reason was preparing it for subsequent ceremonies. A recent rationalization seems to lay stress on hygienic considerations.

Camwood was then rubbed on the corpse by daughters and female relatives of the deceased. This exercise also permitted these relatives to have a last glimpse of the deceased. Women of the lineage immediately assembled in the *nggay* or family hall while the house where the corpse lay was prepared. A mat (*gham*) was brought on which to lay the corpse and in the past broad forest leaves (*kiman*) and more recently banana leaves were collected for mourners to lie on. Wood was also gathered, as during the vigil fire was continuously kept burning, conceivably for fumigation, perhaps to keep evil forces away.

The Death of Members of Initiation Associations

The death of certain people called for special attention. such can be grouped into *anggae shiv*, sing. *nggae shiv*, 'medicine men or herbalists, *wir manjong* or initiated members of the Nso' war clubs and finally persons initiated into particular secret societies, especially the societies of the palace--those who had *tang shiv* or *tang nto*' respectively.

Anggae Shiv or Medicine Men

When a *nggae shiv* or medicine man died, some precautions were taken before he was buried. In fact, while still alive, a *nggae shiv* trained one of his kin to eventually take over the practice. When he died, other practitioners in this art came to the residence of the deceased and performed some preventive rites before the family members were allowed to get on with the burial and mourning ceremonies. *Anggae shiv* were people who had more knowledge than ordinary people or, as the Nso' would say, were "people of four eyes" (*wir si kwee*). Their rite, a well-kept secret, was aimed at preventing the deceased fellow-practitioner from coming back to harass the homestead and family members of the deceased.

Renowned medicine men received two burials. The essential one was done at a road junction, *ntamer*, a place endowed with such mystic power that a burial which was done here stripped off his extra-ordinary powers and prevented the deceased from coming back to his descendants. What was buried at the *ntamer* was the deceased man's pillow or *mbuuy* (this was the polished branch of a tree or the large end of a bamboo). This, according to fellow-practitioners, was the real burial, which was done solely by them. They ended it by receiving a fowl and palm wine which only they could eat and drink. The burial of the real corpse was then done in the premises of the dead man in the same way as other burials.

***Wir Hanjong* or members of a Nso' War Club**

When an important member of a Nso' war club or *manjong* who was initiated at a high level (had *tang manjong*) died, other *manjong* initiates came to the house of the dead member and took his club insignia away. These insignia consisted of *ngko' manjong* and *tan manjong* or the *manjong* shoulder bag and cap. These insignia, supposed to constitute the essence of *manjong*, were taken away by these initiates and buried in a nearby bush. They too, received a fowl and palm wine after this symbolic burial.

The fact that his *ngko' manjong* was taken away was considered as withdrawing the associate's membership, and eventually a substitute could be looked for to replace him. Once the group that went to reconnoitre and acknowledge death returned to their base at *manjong* quarters, they immediately proceeded to the dismissal of the deceased member—*reti wo ree*—from their ranks, mostly by drinking and eating what was brought from the deceased's residence.

***Nggaa ntang* or initiated member of societies**

Some members of societies in Nso' were initiated, thus distinguishing themselves from ordinary members. The deaths of those initiated at the highest level or those described in Nso' as *ve ntange* (the initiated), were handled with special attention. At the death of one of them, other members who came for their agreed rite, took away what was called *kibam ke shiv* or *kitu ke shiv* (or principal medicine insignium). The deceased's old worn-out cap was another insignium these members obtained and took back. These insignia were taken back to the society's base or back to the palace before the burial of the dead person was completed.

Burial Ceremonies

Once death was acknowledged and announced, the next stage was burial. The rites which followed were different for different persons in accordance with rank and status. The process started with the convocation of kin, friends and well-wishers. Associated with the digging of the grave was the collection of a series of items. For ordinary people, there were the mats, *gham si* (sing. *gham*), thatching grass (*wuy*), small bamboos (*meba'ay*, sing. *shiba'ay*), guns and gun powder, leaves (*vifu*), fowls (*nggevev si*, sing. *nggevev*), and maize (*nggwasang*).

These items could be supplemented by *kiwooy*, an aspergeant used in the case of the burial of dignitaries, men of title and initiates. As might be expected the burial of the *Fon* called for elaborate preparations and execution.

The first act was digging the grave—say. This was dug very close to the deceased's house, often in front of it. Loshaa (1988:14) has it that in the distant past, some people were buried inside their houses, but this was not corroborated by any of our own later information.³ Once the grave was deep enough—no precise measurements are possible, but often the depth could reach a young man's shoulders—a shelf or chamber, *lem*, was excavated on the side of the grave facing the deceased's residence. On completion, the chamber was first lined with a wall of bamboos—meba'ay—then grass—wuy—was laid inside the wall before a mat—gham—was put down, on which to lay the corpse. The corpse was stripped of any ornaments.

Doubtless, burials in Nso' must have undergone considerable evolution. Christianity has influenced burials in recent years. Some of our informants (as did Kaberry's) spoke of laying corpses in the past with the right hand side uppermost for men and the left hand side uppermost for women, an analogy with the burial of navel-cords, when those of boys were buried at the right hand side of doors and those of girls at the left. Father Emonts in the period 1913-15 witnessed a burial in which the corpse "is tied up into a small bundle, not stretched out. The legs of the corpse are bound to the upper trunk, the head bent over the breast. A coffin is not used.,⁴ Thus, Father Emonts' information makes it appear that at least some of the dead were formerly buried in a foetal position, or as if to prevent their escape. After the corpse was introduced into the chamber, the entrance was closed with another wall of bamboos and the grave was filled.

The filling and trampling depended on the type of death. If it was a "good death", that of an old person, the exercise was jovial and dragged on for hours to accompanying burial *music--lung se say* (sing. *lung say*). On the contrary, when the death was "unacceptable", that is death in adolescence or youth--those deaths described as *tinen*, *forsin* and *shersin*, all seen as untimely destruction—no such burial songs were uttered. If the deceased was a lineage head, a lineage dignitary or a person in charge of birth ceremonies, a medicine man or a *nsii* man (a valiant man who had either killed enemies in war or fierce or large animals such as leopards, buffalo or elephants), the trampling of their graves was done to the accompaniment of *nsii* songs and the stampers were asperged with *kiwooy* liquid. When the grave was half full, the lineage head—taala' or faay—spoke the invocation or *kingka* in which he addressed the dead person telling him that nobody "knew" about his death. In such cases, the dead person was called upon to promote births, prevent

hunting accidents and bring good things generally. After this, in the case of female burials, co-wives came up to say, for example, ‘there was never a harsh word between us’, while visitors standing by the grave mentioned the deceased’s kind actions. The burial continued with either *lung* kpu—death song—or *lung nsii*, *nsii* song. Here below is a death song:

Yaaya (Taata) wor bee a? Wu du ne a - Yaaya?
WU du ne e mbor la’ a?

Yaaya (Taata) wor bee a? WU du ne a - Yaaya?
Wu du ne e mbor la’ a?

Ji wu du boo wiy a?
Wu du ne a Yaaya
Wu du ne e mbor la’ a.

Where is our Yaaya (our old one)? She has gone - Our Yaaya?
 She has gone to *mbor la’* (homestead of peacefulness)?

Where is our Yaaya (our old one)? She has gone - Our Yaaya?
 She has gone to *mbor la’*?

Is she going to come back? No, she has gone - Our Yaaya She has gone to *mbor Le*?

As the grave was being filled, corn (maize) was boiled in the family hall, *nggay*, and as soon as the burial was over, the corn, now known as *nggwasang say* and with it *nggrev say*, i.e. corn and fowl for the grave, were brought out to those finishing off the burial. Some property of the deceased (for women pots and bags, and bags and spears for men) were broken or torn apart on the grave at the completion of the burial. Any person who came to condole went to the grave site to pay homage to the deceased after the burial. Women were afterwards led to the *nggay* where they kept company with the horde of other wailing womenfolk. Then came two other rites worthy of mention. These were *mbu’ kpu* and *ma’ kpu*. *Mbu’ kpu*, derived from *bu’* (lit. struggle), was a rite which took place the day after the day of death. This was a free¹ day in between the death day and the day on which mourning ceremonies were supposed to start. This day was dedicated to despairing wailing, demonstrating intense grief. *Ma’ kpu* was reserved for the *Fon* and is described below.

One other rite which merits mention was also performed. When an agnate died away from home, soil was carried from his grave in a white fibre bag and brought to his lineage where it was given a normal burial, thus ending a cycle which had earlier commenced with a similar burial of the navel-cord. The latter had created mystical links between the individual and his territory, and symbolically bringing the person back was necessary so as to include him in the realm of his ancestors. Daughters were brought back in similar rites if they were not old enough to have returned to their lineage of origin. Through this “return of the corpse” nobody, no ancestor, felt offended.

Special mention should now be made of the burial of Nso’ *afon* (pl.). This event called for particular preparation and execution. (Much has already been written on this topic and the reader is invited to refer to the following authors: Mzeka 1980, Banadzem 1986, Njongai 1988, Fanzo and Chem-Langhee 1989). The Fon’s death was euphemistically described as the “Fon is missing or the “Fon has disappeared” or again “the Nso’ sun has set”. In addition to other items necessary for burial, two rams, some royal cloths, i.e. *kelanglang* (pl. *vilanglang*) and *ndzey njav* (pl. *ndzey se njav*), a leopard skin and salt were collected.

In the preparation of the grave the most essential sections of the palace were figuratively represented, namely, the *maandze nggay*, *taakibu’* and *faay kishiiy*, respectively the forecourt where the Fon receives the people, the inner audience court and the Fon’s bedchamber. He was seated in a chamber excavated in on wall of the grave with all his attributes. After the elaborate burial, accompanied by *nsii* song, then followed the rite of *ma’ kpu*, a rite solely reserved to Nso’ *afon*. It was done by *yeewong* (princess-priestess), who with her shoulder bag (*ngko’ wong*), went across the outer court into the family hall, *nggay*, stooped before the assembled widows and children of the late *Fon*, placed a leaf on the floor and wailed out loud as a sign of officially announcing the death and the opening of the mourning ceremonies.

Pollution Burials - *Kpu Kifan*

Some deaths described as “bad deaths” or pollution deaths were given burials accompanied by cleansing rites. Such were deaths by *suicide*—*kingkersin*—or death followed by swollen belly (*kum*), that is a swollen belly that did not subside after the death or, worse still, a swollen belly that appeared after death. These pollution deaths (*kpu se kifan*) were never given normal burials. The *kifan* initiates, that is those whose lineages had suffered from such deaths, would gather in a particular spot in the compound to

perform their *rite--kefemri kefan*. This rite consisted in making a fire in the affected compound and continuously burning wet leaves and herbs to produce a smoky atmosphere. Other concoctions prepared earlier or prepared in former *vifan* (pl.) burials were left on a stone outside the house where visitors helped themselves to the medicaments. These medicines were given out to drive away *kefan* or pollution from the neighbourhood but also for hygienic reasons. Such corpses might be found days after death and could easily have been decomposing and polluting the atmosphere. In general people were not willing to be exposed to illness in such circumstances, especially to the cough which might attend them. In suicide cases the initiates occasionally blew a horn, called out the deceased's name and reviled the suicide and his criminal act.

The site of the suicide or the place where the pollution took place was confiscated by the *kefan* initiates and the deceased's kin had to pay a fine to retrieve such property (either land, trees or other sites).

In order to bury such persons a grave (never called a grave—say—but a *hole--bii*) was dug close to the site of death, thus permitting the initiates to push the dead body into it without much ceremony. For *kum* cases, those with swollen bellies, the deceased was put in a big basket, *kegati*, tied with ropes and taken by initiates to some uncultivated spot where he was “thrown away in the bush” (*ma'ay e kwa'*). Such bush areas were avoided by the population. If kin wanted to bury their relative, he was bought from the initiates so as to accord him a fitting burial. But this burial was never followed by sorrow and even less by mourning of the intensity shown on the occasion of normal deaths. After the burial, the initiates sat in a particular spot and, for four days running, constantly received abundant food, fowls and palm wine so as to carry out their cleansing rite.

Mourning Ceremonies

After burial and the rites of *mbu' kpu* and *ma' kpu*, then followed the mourning ceremonies which differed according to the position of the individual in society. The mourning period was one of bereavement, intense sorrow and collective lamentation. The main features of mourning were wailing by women at the announcement of death and sporadic outbursts of crying when other kin came in after the burial. Other characteristics were the constant gun shots, the shabby and unkempt appearance kept up by mourners, the custom of going bare-headed and the wearing of white fibre strands. Women put white fibre strands (*kefiam*) round their waists, while those who had lost either a child, husband or wife, wore fibre strands round

neck and ankles. The dances of different lineages also displayed and palace masquerades also went to display in the compound of bereavement. Among the dances performed were those of *cong* and *njang* for women while men displayed those of *rum*, *kikum*, *menang*, *nggang*, *nsang*, *manjong* an' others owned by particular compounds or subordinate lineages. During the mourning period, women assembled in the family hall, *nggay*, where they lay on the ground on leaves, purposely making themselves very dusty, untidy and unkempt.

The mourning fell into two phases, one of real mourning that started two days after burial and went on for three days for men and children, four days for women, lordlings and lineage heads, *asbeey* and *afaay*, eight days for great state councillors and finally twelve days for the *afon*. At the end of each of the allocated days of mourning, the first phase was rounded off by a big ceremony called *shovir kiviyy*. On this day, people shaved their heads and cleaned themselves up, throwing away leaves and reverting to sleeping on beds instead of on the floor. They also wore their caps again.

After the first phase, lasting for a prescribed number of consecutive days, they started the second phase which consisted of memorial days which recurred weekly. This could take place on the day the person died but most often it was transferred to a *Kiloovey* or a *Nggoylum*, two rest and sacrificial days in Nso'. These memorial days, *viiviy ve kpu* (pl.) continued for periods which depended on the wishes of relatives, and the final one—*kiviyy ke kpu ke bam ki*, was delayed for as long as possible. As soon as this last memorial day was celebrated, the death ceremony was agreed to be over unless a sacrifice, *ntangri*, later proved necessary or an appeasement rite, *keidir*, was also thought proper. A last rite to conclude death in some specific cases was also necessary. This occurred on the death of the first born of couple, or when either of the partners of a young couple, who might not yet be endowed with a child, died. Such deaths and all the death of *nsii* men (valiant warriors and hunters, see above) and the *Fon*, called for the rite of *su kpu* or "washing away the death". After the mourning period, this rite was accomplished, with the aim of leading the affected persons, those who had lost child, husband or wife to forget the sorrowful event and restart normal activities.

The officiants were people who had earlier suffered a similar fate and so had become, in a sense, initiates. They took the bereaved, who took a hoe if a woman and a cutlass if a man, or hoe and a cutlass each in the case of the death of their child, to a stream. There the officiants washed those undergoing the rite before taking them back home. On the way back home, on reaching the compound, the man cleared grass while the woman tilled a piece of land before both or each of them were taken into the house and

given food. The symbols of death, either the white fibre waist strands (*kifam*) or the strands worn round neck or ankle (*menggoranggi'*, sing. *shinggoranggi'*) were forcibly removed from them, thus ending the death ceremony.

The rite of su *kpu* was also done in the case of a *nsii* man or the Fon. This led to the population or those participating to perform *ngven*, which was a form of washing away death. To round off the death of a Fon, *vibay* (councillors), and *ataanto'* (retainer lords, sing. *taanto'*), mourners and the population as a whole went in procession in a direction in which it was possible to cross a stream. On crossing the stream, the *ataanto'* "blessed" the population and the women removed all the symbols of mourning and cast them into the stream. The procession then went back to the palace to the rhythm of *nsii* songs. At the outer court of the palace, *maandze nggay*, dances were staged and the final exercise was the conclusion of mourning by *mengkang me nggven*, "a concourse of jesters" who came to display all over the capital. One of the palace masqueraders, the fearsome *kibarangko'*, rounded off the rite when it dispersed these jesters.

Afterlife

If we were to rely solely on answers to our limited questionnaire to sort out the Nso' people's conception of life after death, such answers would be misleading. Most respondents were confused, or gave abstract accounts or were evasive; some even refuted the idea of an afterlife. On the other hand, participant observation in this field produced a much more comprehensive and affirmative conception of the life beyond. The Nso' acted out their philosophy of the afterlife through the various rites of *kingka* (invocation), *ntangri* (sacrifice), *cu* (veneration), *kidiv* (reconciliation and appeasement rite), and the many memorial celebrations (*vingka ve kpu*).

Other signs help us to trace the people's idea of life after death. They include the manner in which people are buried. The different tomb structures, those of ordinary men or of titled people and especially those of the sovereign (*Fon*) indicated what they thought would happen when kinsfolk died. The excavated chamber (*lem*) was cosy and even comfortable. Thus the individual perpetually disposed of had an acceptable resting place, from whence he probably organized some activities. For the sovereign (*Fon*) all sections of the palace were represented; the terraced and chambered tomb with its *maandze nggay*, *taakibu'* and *faay kishiiny* were prepared in such a way as to allow the departing ruler to retain his earthly attributes in the otherworld. In former royal burial rites, at Kovvifem, Taavisa and now Kimbo', the sacrificial areas are constantly maintained and sacrifices offered yearly. In

each of them and on different occasions, the rulers who were buried there, in reality or symbolically, were invoked and sacrificed to. All indicates that they were to be held to be close by and communicated with the living. A study of Proper names, as we saw at the beginning of this paper, elicited a specific concept1on of the afterlife. Names like *Beeshaa* (lit. resting to pass on), and *Go'la* (nobody can avoid death) emphasized the fact that people were just in transit on earth. Their final destination was the otherworld.

For the Nso', life did not end with death. They had, as it is clearly emerging, a strong belief in life after death. Death did not mean the immediate end of the existence of individuals but rather a transition from one mode of existence to another. When people died, they continued to live somewhere and were often in contact with those still living. The afterlife was more joyful than life on earth, and a much longed for stage, hence their high expectations of that afterlife. Those who went to that idealized home—*mbor la'*—were the dead, divided into the ordinary dead and the ancestors. The difference between them derived principally from the lives they had led. Those who undertook shepherding activities at various levels (family, lineage and ethnic group), joined a superior class of the dead—as ancestors—, in which case they were venerated, sacrificed to and consulted or implored to act as intercessors between superior beings, the Supreme Being and the living.

Some facts about ancestorship will be further examined to comprehend this existence better. The element of consanguinity was preponderant in it. Besides this, the acquisition of superior status and the aforementioned mediating role characterized ancestorship and the life of ancestors in the hereafter. Given these characteristics, they performed the same functions as leaders of their families and communities as they had when they were alive. In this new, and more superior but less profane state of being, they were capable of many actions which either positively or negatively affected the course of events for those still living.

Their passage into the world of ancestors was accomplished as soon as all the funeral rites had been performed with the last memorial *rite*—*kingka ke kinvi*—*sealing* the entrance into the world of superior beings. In the abode of ancestors, they could become angry if all that was due to them had not been attributed to them. In which case, they punished with misfortune and sickness those who did not accord them their normal dues. Such irregularities or misunderstandings were erased when the living, after taking cognizance of them, took appropriate measures to remedy the situation and restore concord in their relations with the ancestors. A variety of rites were possible to dispel such misunderstandings. Among them were the special memorial

celebrations or *vingka ve kpu* (sing. *kingka ke kpu*) for different types of kin. These were *ngka kpu nggon se juu* (memorial celebrations for female relatives or daughters), *ngka se kpu se ayiy ataala*, those for mothers of lineage heads, *ngka se kpu se vikiy vee la*, memorial celebrations for wives of a lineage, *ngka se kpu se won vee la*, those for male children of a lineage and finally, *nsum juu* or memorial celebration for lineage heads.

There was constant dialogue between the dead and the living. Besides these celebrations whose objective was to appease the dead, there were also the *ntangri* (sacrifice)⁶ and *kidiv* (appeasing rite) which were performed when conflicts had existed between a dead and a living member of a family. In principle, after these celebrations and rites, normal relations were restored between the two parties.

Some dead persons, in the case of premature death, when they probably did not accomplish their assigned mission on earth, were held to be reincarnated, that is, were reborn into their various families, thus obtaining another opportunity to complete their mission. If this did not happen, they went to their final abode. This home of the departed was vaguely defined and defied analysis. Some were believed to remain in compounds or roam about near these compounds, especially as they did and could intervene in the lives of the living. However, since people were buried close by, the first place people thought of as the abode of the dead was under the ground. Other places mentioned were the undergrowth of trees, dark mysterious woodlands, pools of deep water and ravines. From these places they could come out to communicate with those still living.

Some people, even while alive, were believed to have special psychic powers. They were thought to change themselves into animals, insects, birds or some physical phenomena (winds, clouds, torrential rains, to name but a few). After death, those who possessed such psychic powers were transformed into those beings or phenomena and went to their final home in that form, or they could—it was thought in most cases—take the form of spirits. These transformed creatures could be either good or bad, depending essentially on the lives they had led on earth: they were the good or bad *spirits-vibay ve jung vi* or *vibay ve bi vi*. Depending on their character (good or bad) these were either tolerated and preserved and could positively influence events on earth, or were destroyed by special medicine *men—anggae nggam* (sing. *ngaa nggam*)—so that they should not harass kith and kin.

Conclusion

Many ideas emerge from this brief study. As it ends, it appears to me that there is much to be done to extend and deepen it. As studies on Nso' and neighbouring people on such topics are at their beginning, an attempt at a coherent historic collection of information and its interpretation is not at present possible. Data collection revealed strong Christian and Western influences. This was what we realized when we started a conventional collection of data based on a questionnaire. Meanwhile, the actual observation of most practices was very instructive and was more important in producing our material. The material collected also revealed to us that despite apparent Christian connections, the Nso' remained attached to their traditional practices. The total corrosion of the latter had not yet taken place.

Other elements worthy of note are the fact that the method of participant observation for such topics as the one we have just treated should be strongly emphasized without necessarily neglecting the traditional questionnaire approach. Our recommendation for developing this topic, as it seems that a more detailed study is imperative, especially by a researcher with a sound anthropological background, is therefore to insist on more sheer observation and more elaborate, longer and repeated field study. In line with this, we need to draw attention to the use and analysis of names and formulae to extract useful information. Eponyms and toponyms fall into this category as possible sources of data especially for a reconstructive history which uses orality. Such data might resist "corruption" and evolution better than typically oral sources. We are using this approach in another study and hope it will be of much help.

It is also evident that sharp social or positional differences in life continue in the hereafter. There are many other elements which we can detect in this brief study: the constant appeal to specialists in many rituals, the differentiation in ritual depending on the status of the individual concerned, some practices with some pragmatic end-results (washing corpses, ashes in houses, white as a mourning colour, fire in houses where the deceased was laid out, to name but these). It is obviously too soon to attempt any interpretation of these events, though we might indicatively make mention of the ideological, moral and social implications of some of these practices. Any such interpretations should only be attempted after a more intensive study among Nso' and neighbouring Grassfields peoples has been undertaken.

Other topics call for more reflection than a brief paper can permit. Let us consider, for example, the ambiguity arising from the act of decapping the

sovereign before burial thus reducing him to the rank of an ordinary citizen, while he was supposed to reach the ancestor world, received sacrifices and was kept in touch with important events. Many such questions arise from this study. We are therefore left more curious at the end than when we started this study: a “paradox” but an incentive to further research.

Endnotes

1. This can be seen in the importation of “new witchcrafts”, namely, *famla*, *kupe*, *nyoonggu*, and *kong*, which have latterly infested this region: see Patrick Mbunwe-Samba, *Witchcraft, Magic and Divination: A Personal Testimony*, Bamenda, 1989.

2. Interview with Faay Liiwong, Kumbo, Nso’, 28 June 1989.

3. Since the individual was buried close to his house, in a chamber excavated in one of the grave walls, this could give the impression that he was finally resting in his house.

4. See Nso’ Working Notes by E.M. Chilver, 1985: ‘Father Emonts on traditional religious concepts; death and conversion in Kitiwum (December 1912 - November 1915)’. K.R.C., Bamenda.

5. P.N. Mzeka, *The Core Culture of Nso’* (Agawam, Ma.: Jerome Radin Co., 1980), p.37.

6. See J. Banadzem, “The Influence of World Religions on Nso’ Traditional Beliefs” (forthcoming).

References

Published Sources

Aletum, T.M.; and Fisiy, C.F. *Socio-Political Integration and Nso Institutions*. Yaounde: MESIRES, 1989.

-----, *Konglanjo*. Yaounde: The University of Yaounde, 1988.

Chem-Langhee, B. "The Transfer of Power and Authority in Nto' Ngkar." *MUNTU*. (2e Semestre, 1987):149-68.

------. *The Shuufaayship of Professor Bernard Nsokika Fonlon*.

Yaounde: By the Author, B.P. 755 Yaounde, Cameroon, 1989.

Chem-Langhee, B.; Fanzo, Verkijika G.; and Chilver, E.M. "Nto' Nso' and its occupants: Privileged Access and Internal Organization in the Old and New Palaces." *Paideuma*, 31 (1985):151-81.

Fanzo, V.G.; and Chem-Langhee, B. "The Transfer of Power and Authority in Nto' Nso'." *Paideuma*, 35 (1989):49-66.

Henige, D. *Oral Historiography*. London: Longman, 1982. Kaberry, P.M. "Witchcraft of the Sun: Incest in Nso." In *Man in Africa*, pp.175-95. Edited by M. Douglas and P.M. Kaberry. London: Tavistock, 1969.

Mzeka, P.N. *The Core Culture of Nso'*. Agawam, Ma.: Jerome Radin Co., 1980.

Njoya Njiasse, A.; and Njimotapon, Njikam. "La Fete des Funerailles d'un Chef de Famille Bamum de Maghet-Malantouen." *science et Technique*, III: 1-2 (Janvier-Juin, 1985).

Tanla-Kishani, Bongasu. "Reflections sur la pensee philosophique Africaine vue d'Europe et d'Afrique." *Diogene*, 130 (Avril-Juin 1985).

Unpublished sources

Bifon I. Fonctionnement politique et aspects ideologiques (1790-1947)." Doctorat de 3e cycle Thesis. Universite de Paris I, Pantheon Sorbonne, 1986.

-----"Les Notions du Temps et d'Espace chez les Nso' du Cameroun." Memoire d'histoire, U. de Paris I, Pantheon Sorbonne, 1980.

Chilver, E.M. "The Burial and Installation of the Afon of Nso': The Sequence as set out in Paul N. Mzeka's *The Core culture of Nso'*, with Notes and Comments derived from M.D.W. Jeffreys' and P.M. Kaberry's MSS (T.S.)." Institute of Human sciences and Department of History, Yaounde, 1986.

- Chilver, E.M. "Thaumaturgy in contemporary traditional religions: The Nso' case in mid-century." Paper read to a Faculty of Theology Undergraduate Seminar, Oxford, H.T. 1985 (T.S.). Regional Major Seminary, Bambui.
- Loshaa, P. (Rev.). "Jesus' Eschatological Family; Nso' Ancestors' Membership." Essay submitted for Diploma in Pastoral studies, Amecea Pastoral Institute, Gaba, 1988.
- Njongai, E.B. "The Funeral and Mourning Rites of a Fon in Traditional Nso' Society (An Ethical Evaluation)." B.A. Degree Essay in Philosophy, Regional Major Seminary, Bambui, 1988.

Chiefs, Sub-Chiefs And Local Control: Negotiations Over Land, Struggles Over Meaning*

MIRIAM GOHEEN

When I lived *in* the Nso' chiefdom (more properly fondom or kingdom) *in* western Cameroon from 1979 to 1981, I spent quite a bit of time with one of the sub-chiefs, the *Fon* of Nse'. I became a regular visitor at his palace and spent many an afternoon drinking palm wine in the courtyard while the *Fon* of Nse', a calm and stately presence, entertained visitors and petitioners for favours, settled disputes, and *in* general conducted the business of his fondom. One afternoon during the rainy season as I slid down the muddy path and stood dripping *in* the entryway to the palace, the *Fon* of Nse', unusually agitated and upset, motioned me to follow him into a small interior courtyard where a number of important lineage heads who were also 'landlords' or, more accurately, the *ataangIVEN* ('men who own the fields') of Nse' had gathered. I watched them fill a ceremonial calabash or *sho'* with palm wine from the palace. Swearing an oath to their ancestors that the ritual they were preparing would seek the truth, each man spat into the *sho'*.² The lineage heads then exited *en masse*, clambered into a waiting Land-Rover, raised their umbrellas and headed out to complete the ritual. The *Fon* of Nse' and I headed back to the relative dryness of the palace.

Soon we were seated sipping palm wine in the interior of the palace *in* a small private audience room. A dim light seeping *in* from the high narrow latticed windows cast shadows of the figures carved into the *Fon's* throne against the dank walls, evoking images from a Mongo Beti novel. The *Fon* of Nse', still upset but now somewhat calmed by both the wine and the ritual preparation, proceeded to explain the events of the past half-hour. It seems

* This chapter was first published in *Africa* 62:3(1992):389-412 and is reproduced here with some modifications by kind permission of the author.' Nse' is shown as Nseh or Nser in some maps.

his relationship with the *Fon* of Nso', the paramount *Fon* of the Nso' kingdom, had been strained for some time. The day before it had been stretched to breaking point when the *Fon* of Nso' took hoes away from Nse' women working *in* fields over which both rulers claimed jurisdiction. (The women had been using hoes on a Nso' 'country Sunday'—a ritual day set aside by the appropriate ruler and the 'landlord' of the field on which hoes are not to be used, as a sign of fealty and respect to the ritual leader and his ancestors.) Not quite knowing how to respond, I took a gulp of palm wine and stared at my cup. Graciously ignoring my lack of response, the *Fon* of Nse' continued his story. 'We in Nse' are in the right; it is our land. We perform the rituals for the land and the *Fon* of Nso' is a trespasser.' The lineage heads were at this moment travelling to the land in question to pour the contents of the ritual calabash on the earth and swear an oath that this was true. Furthermore, the *Fon* of Nse' went on to inform me that he was not a subject of the *Fon* of Nso', by emphasising the fact that he was walking together with the *Fon* of Nso' as an equal, as a brother, using my own power. We helped Nso' fight the Bamum and the Germans. Now he [the *Fon* of Nso'] says he owns us. How can that be when we were moving together as equals? The *Fon* of Nse' was never captured [by Nso']. 50 the *Fon* of Nso' has a very big head. If you go to meet him now he will not tell you the truth.

By focusing on the estrangement between these two rulers and explaining this single event in one relatively obscure fondom in the highlands of Cameroon, I will try to clarify some of the many complexities involved in describing relations to the land in modern Africa. An account of the estrangement between these two men who, according to the Nse', 'became David and Jonathan' in the early twentieth century³ must include an understanding of two core symbols in Nso': the significance of the Earth in Nso' cosmology and the related meaning of stewardship of the land as a symbol of political (and religious) leadership. It must also include two relatively recent processes: a growing scarcity of arable land brought about partially by population growth, but also by the ambiguous tenure situation created by contradictions between traditional tenure arrangements and national land ordinances—contradictions which have been exacerbated by a propensity toward privatisation of land and land use, and an accompanying tendency to treat land as a commodity, a resource with a cash value assigned to its use and ownership (see Goheen, 1988). Clearly, the present disaffection between these two men cannot be understood without reference to history, keeping in mind that the present, while a product of history, is not simply a continuation of the past. The critical task here is to discover just how cultural meaning is reordered by the historical process. The aim of this study is to

unravel the meaning of this event and trace the various threads backwards and forwards in time to reveal how the reproduction of particular structures and relationships ends up instead as their transformation.⁴

Land shortages are rapidly becoming a serious local issue in the Nso' *Iondom* of highland Cameroon. Old hostilities between Fulani herders and local agriculturalists have worsened, and newer tensions between constituencies of the fondom have emerged and intensified. The meaning of control over land as symbolic of legitimate political authority has, however, changed less rapidly than the practices associated with the exercise of this control. According to customary tenure, all people in Nso' have rights to farm land by virtue of citizenship in the fondom. The *Fon* of Nso' is the titular owner of all land, but this is symbolic of his political control. Actual allocation of land is in the hands of some lineage heads called *ataangven*, or the 'men who own the fields.' Their rights are symbolic of their ability to manage a large kinship group, and they are under obligation to give out farm land to all their dependants and other non-landowning citizens. Land is 'begged' with a presentation consisting of a calabash of palm wine and a fowl; all people working on the land of a particular *taangven* (pl. *ataangven*) also owe him respect and fealty. In the precolonial era, and in most of Nso' before the introduction of coffee in the 1940s, the lineage head (and not a man's heirs) inherited his property when he died. Women most often farm on the land of their husband's lineage, although they have had rights through their mother's family too (Kaberry, 1952; Goheen, 1984, 1988). In the sub-fondoms of Nso' the *Fon* of Nso' has allocated his political control over land to the sub-chiefs in their respective villages.

Access to land has been viewed as a right of citizenship in Nso'; today that right has been put in jeopardy. As land becomes scarce and begins to have a commodity value attached to it, conflicts over the control of rights of access to and allocation of its use have sharpened between the paramount *Fon* of Nso' and his sub-chiefs. These conflicts have become particularly acute between the *Fon* of Nso' and the *Fon* of Nse', whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, the latter being the chief of a village in the northern reaches of Nso'. Both rulers have claimed the right to allocate land lying on the Nso'-Nse' border, between Nse' and Nso' proper, each appealing to a different set of rights and a different interpretation of history. As we shall see, their dispute revolves primarily around rights in people as opposed to rights in territory, focused here on control of access to land, and around different historical legitimations of these rights.

Struggles over land and over the meaning of its control have accelerated rapidly since the national government passed land ordinances in 1974

encouraging 'rational development' through privatisation (Cameroon, 1974). These land ordinances have enabled an emerging rural elite to acquire large tracts of land under individual title. I have argued elsewhere that they have effectively encouraged not agricultural development but rather growing land scarcity and conflict (Goheen, 1988). The dispute between these two rulers is just one, albeit an important and public one, among many such disputes as people invoke various rules of each, and sometimes both, systems of tenure to secure access to land.

In looking at the negotiations over the right to control land, and the shifting relationship of different social actors to this control, I have assumed certain perspectives:

First, I read the history of the relationship between Nso' and Nse' not simply as a chronology of events, but rather as what Jean Comaroff (1985) has called a 'dialectic in a double sense'. It needs to be seen on the one hand as the structural interplay of socio-cultural order and human practice, and on the other as the historical articulation of dominant and subordinate systems. This double dialectic is played out both in internal centre-periphery relationships within the *fondom* and in external relationships between the fondoms and the colonial and postcolonial governments. These relationships and different interpretations of their meaning held by various people from Nse' and Nso' proper, including the two rulers, lead to conflicting and often contradictory practices on the part of different categories of people. These practices both reproduce and transform the structure of relationships within the fondoms.

Second, I see a shift in the nature of productive relationships and the social relations of land tenure, which have historically been relations of dependence—mainly lineage- and kinship-based—but which under present circumstances are increasingly characterised by the growing importance of national politics and accumulative economics. Land has become a form of accumulation as well as a means of subsistence. Negotiations over these shifting relationships have been largely contained and reproduced in the superstructure, although changing material conditions have recently intensified these struggles. The terms of the discourse have contained several historically changing, and sometimes contradictory, themes as different people contest interpretations of what is actually happening. Ideology, or control of the dominant discourse, is then itself an aspect of the social relations of production.⁵

Finally, I see continuity in the cultural meaning of control over land as a symbol of political leadership even in the context of growing privatisation. The cultural meaning of stewardship of land as a symbol of political

leadership is reinforced by the symbolic significance of the earth, as well as by the tendency for new elites to invest in the symbols of traditional Nso' leaders and to participate actively in traditional politics.

Regional and Historical Background

The Nso' say that 'before foreigners came, Nso' was in the earth [*nsay*] and the earth was at peace' (Chilver, 1990). This may not be precisely accurate in historical terms but it is suggestive of the connection the Nso' make between their physical and social environment. The Nso' belong to the earth just as the earth belongs to them; it is the place of the important dead, the ancestors, who are believed to have power over the living. The earth can become 'hot' and punish those who transgress against the moral code, and can be called upon to make judgment in disputes. The Nso' physical and social worlds are inextricably interconnected, and it is within this context that we need to understand the connection between the religious and political connotations of stewardship of land in Nso' cosmology.

Nso' is the largest fondom in the Bamenda Grassfields of what is today the North West Province of Cameroon. The borders of the fondom largely follow those of Bui Division. Bui Division straddles the south-east arc of the Ring Road, the laterite-surface road connecting the main towns of Cameroon's North West Province to the provincial capital of Bamenda. From Bamenda a well paved highway connects the Province with Bafusam, Nkongsamba, and Duala, Cameroon's major commercial city, on the Atlantic coast. By the latter half of the nineteenth century Sem II, *Fon* of Nso', through both conquest and the adroit manipulation of a palace-based title system, was able to consolidate his power to create a regional hegemony which has remained salient up to the present. Renowned as fierce warriors and described by their German conquerors as greatly feared slave hunters, the Nso' are today often spoken of by their neighbours as arrogant and stiff-necked. The emphasis of local peoples on regional cultural identity, common in Cameroon, reached its most pronounced expression in Nso'. Nso' elites in the national capital in Yaounde can be heard telling their francophone colleagues that they (the colleagues) are fortunate that the Germans came, because otherwise Nso' would have conquered them.

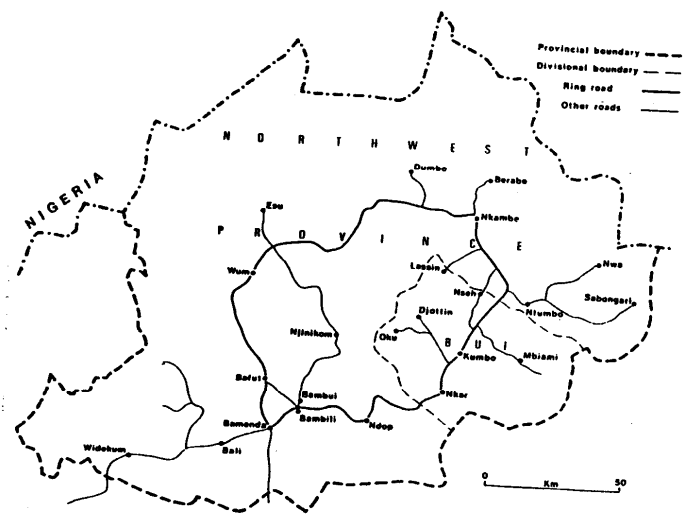


FIG. 1. NORTHWEST PROVINCE WITH BUI DIVISION, CAMEROON

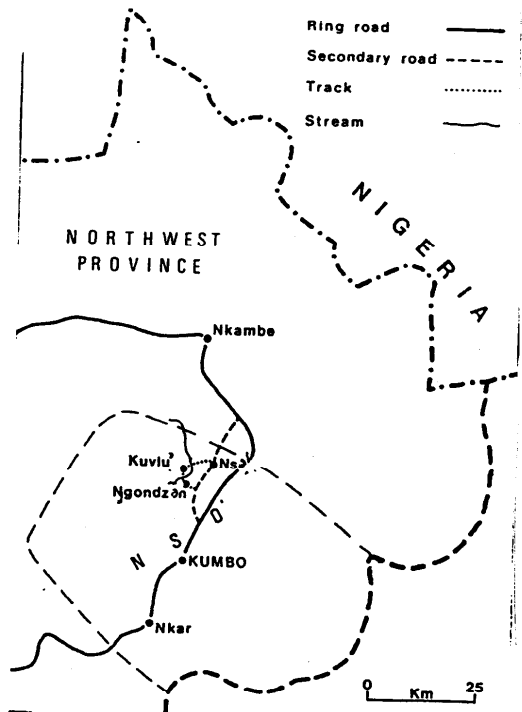


FIG. 2. NSO' FONDOM AND NSO

(Based on a map by Mrs. E. M. Chilver)

With a population of some 200,000 and an area of 2,300 sq km, Nso' is heavily populated for an agricultural region, with an average density of some 85 per square kilometre (compared with an average of 20 per square kilometre nationwide; the national population is 9.5 million) (DeLancey, 1989). The Grassfields in which Nso' is situated constitute a distinct culture area comprised of a number of fondoms of various size and complexity. They range from the small village fondoms of Widekum to the expanding conquest states like Nso' whose population was estimated at 20,000-25,000 by the Germans who fought and finally subdued them in the early twentieth century (Chilver and Kaberry, 1967). While these fondoms are linguistically and ethnically diverse, they share a number of features in common, including the centrality of fonship, the importance of men's secret societies and an emphasis on title and rank as significant political attributes. The Nso' also share the region with two groups of Fulani graziers, the Mbororo, who arrived in the early 1900s, and the Aku'en, originally occupants of the high Jos plateau, who migrated into the area in the 1950s in the wake of a cattle epidemic from what was then the Benue Province of Nigeria.

At one time in the distant past the Grassfields were a forest zone occupied by hunting and gathering peoples (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982). Many cultural features of the current populations indicate some historical connections with the forest peoples south of the highlands. Today the forests have almost disappeared and the most distinctive vegetation is the tall savanna grass after which the region is named. The Grassfields lie east to west between the 4th and 7th parallels. They are essentially a high lava plateau surrounded by a series of lower plains and valleys, broken by volcanic peaks. Ecological conditions are diverse, encouraging the production of both temperate and tropical-zone crops. Altitude within the grassfields varies substantially, ranging from a low of 500 m in the north to the high plateaux around Bamenda and Nso' at 1,400-1,700 m. The plateaux are traversed by mountains with steep slopes, often cut by deep valleys. Largely as a function of altitude, temperature and rainfall vary widely. The high plateau around Nso' receives over 3,000 mm of rainfall annually, while lower regions in the Grassfields average between 1,000 and 2,000 mm. Average temperatures around Nso' range from a mean annual maximum of 66°F to a mean minimum of 51°F. The cold, damp nights during rainy season can chill even Europeans and North Americans who are used to cold, almost arctic northern winters. Lower-lying areas are much hotter, and less pleasant to trek around or travel through in a crowded taxi, with a mean annual maximum of 95.5°F and a minimum of 72°F. There are, generally, a 6- to 7-month rainy season from April to October, a cool dry season from October to December,

and a hot dry season from January to March. Nso' lies in the fertile crescent extending from Bamenda north-east to Nkambe and south to Bafusam in the neighbouring West Province. This region is targeted by the national government for development as a breadbasket for the growing national urban centres.⁶

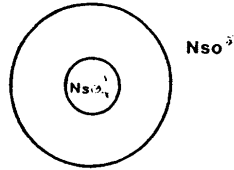
According to local oral tradition, the founders of the dynasty travelled to Nso' in the distant past from the north-east, and succeeded in securing the allegiance of a number of local groups. There are many variants, which have latterly been combined, elaborated and given literary form. It is probable that some movements into and within the area were set off by slaving razzias and that intra-group feuding and local population pressure also played some part.⁷ When the fondom expanded and became increasingly centralised in the course of the nineteenth century, the *afon* of Nso' incorporated various conquered *afon* and important lineage heads into national political life.⁸ The pattern was to grant lesser *afon* rank, titles, and participation in centralised decision-making, along with symbolic and economic privileges, in return for political fealty. The *afon* of larger villages were accorded the title *Fon*' and allowed to retain their hereditary dynasties and autonomy in the management of local affairs in return for political support and tribute (*nshwi*). Two principles came to be stressed in the system of dues and tribute: local derivation of tribute from the sub-chiefs and generalised redistribution from the paramount *Fon* of Nso', emphasising mutual rights and obligations. 'Nso' takes from Ngkar [a sub-fondom of Nso'] and gives to Ngkar,' says the *Fon* of Nso'.

Nse' occupies a special position in relation to the paramount *Fon* of Nso'. The *Fon* of Nse' is neither related to the *Fon* of Nso' nor was he ever conquered, and Nse' was never invaded or attacked by Nso'. Nse' claims to have helped Nso' with its military conquest of other small fondoms in the late nineteenth century. In addition, Nse' contingents helped Nso' defeat Bamum, its neighbour and largest rival, in the late nineteenth century, and fought with Nso' against the Germans in the early twentieth century.⁹ According to both Nse' and Nso' people, the *Fon* of Nse' gave a white fowl, honey, and grain to the *Fon* of Nso' upon their defeat by the Germans. They were subsequently given to the German commander as a sign of surrender.¹⁰ But the interpretation of these gifts differs today. The *Fon* of Nse' insists that he and the *Fon* of Nso' were fighting together as equals and that he never became a subject of Nso'. The *Fon* of Nso', on the other hand, claims that Nse' voluntarily became tributary to *Nso'i* that the fowl and honey were symbols of submission, not merely gifts given to an equal to help pay tribute to the Germans. The *Fon* of Nso' complained to me that 'the Nse' people

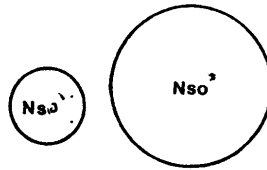
now want their freedom, but I cannot give it. They [and people in several other sub-fondoms] no longer love me or want to live in peace with me. They no longer bring food and firewood.

The *Fon* of Nso' marshals several pieces of evidence to prove the claim that the *Fon* of Nse' voluntarily accepted a tributary relationship with Nso'. He points to the fact that Lamnso', the language of Nso' people, has replaced Limbum, the original language of Nse' as the language of everyday discourse (although Nse' rituals are still performed in Limbum). A white fowl is the traditional gift of surrender, and it was given by Nse' direct to Nso'. In return the *Fon* of Nse' was granted the right to retain all his royal trappings, along with autonomy of rule over his territory. Indeed, Nse' people, while stressing their ties with the Limbum-speaking Nsungli fondoms to the north, acknowledge their citizenship in Nso' (Fjellman and Goheen, 1984). (See Fig. 3 for the different views espoused by various players in this scenario.)

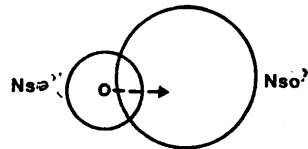
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

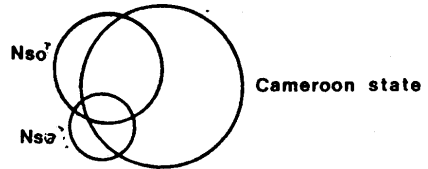


FIG. 3 The different views of the relationship. (a) Fon $Ns\text{o}^2$'s perspective: inclusion, marked by symbols at German surrender. (b) Fon $Ns\text{ɔ}^2$'s perspective: same level of classification, different interpretation of the $Ns\text{o}^2$ -German war and surrender. (c) The individual $Ns\text{ɔ}^2$ perspective: membership depends on the context. (d) Perspective from the 'outside': inclusion/membership depends on the context.

'From Tribute to Tax'

Although most Nse' people agree that they are citizens of Nso', today they stress their differences with and estrangement from the *Fon* of Nso' and assert their independent status. In a pamphlet distributed during Nse' cultural Week in 1977 a whole page is devoted to 'Dissimilarities in the Nse' and Nso' Traditions'. This publication, put out by a local committee headed by the *Fon* of Nse', stresses early co-operation and equality between the two rulers. Although it is vague about the origins of the rift between them, it is quite clear about the fact that a rift exists: friendly ties between the Fons of Nse' and Nso' increased after fighting the Germans. It came to a peak when both Fons agreed to work hand-in-hand. This cordial relationship continued until the last days of *Fon* Mbinglo [the *Fon* of Nso' before the then *Fon*; ... Since then these two friends are apart, their dispute whose solution is basically traditional still remains unsolved till today. [Nse' Week council 1977:3]

By the late 1970s relations between the two rulers had deteriorated to the point that the *Fon* of Nse' began to assert heatedly and publicly that he was not a subject of the *Fon* of Nso', stating angrily that:

You [Nso'] never captured me, I was travelling with you, using my own power, and then we were captured in several places--so why should you treat me in such a way? Because he [the *Fon* of Nso'] just wants tokens, because the population of Nse' is so small, that is why he treats us so.

If we look at the time when people say friction between the two rulers began, we can see that it was at a point when two core principles of governance between the centre (the *Fon* of Nso' and his government in Kumbo) and the periphery (village sub-fondoms)--the principles of local derivation and generalised redistribution--began to be seriously undermined by the Changing policies of the colonial system of taxation and tax collection. until the 1920s the sub-fondoms owed tribute (*nshwi*), consisting primarily of items of surplus production, to the paramount *Fon* of Nso'. The larger part of tribute and presentations given to the *Fon* of Nso' was, however, redistributed either on an ongoing basis through hospitality at the palace or when, in times of food shortage, the palace storehouses were opened up for distribution to all villages of Nso'. The saying 'The *Fon* takes from Ngkar and gives to Ngkar' means also that the *Fon* of Nso' is owed tribute from his sub-chiefs but is expected in turn to look after the needs of all the people of the Nso' *fondom*.

When taxes in the form of a head tax on all adult males (men eighteen years and older) were imposed, first by the Germans in 1909, and then after

1917 by the British colonial administration, they were received by the colonial administration through the *Fon* of Nso' as Sole Native Authority; the commission retained by the *Fon* was viewed as a form of tribute. The sub-chiefs were relieved of the burden of tribute by *Fon* Bi'fon I (the *Fon* of Nso') around 1923 in exchange for their tax-commission as collectors. The British divisional officers were unaware of this arrangement. After tax embezzlement by a royal favourite had been discovered in the mid 1930s collection was more closely supervised and the lists of tax-payers annually revised by touring clerks with local help. Successive reforms in the system of assessment and collection followed whereby sub-chiefs collecting on behalf of their villages received a commission for their trouble.

The important point here is that the tax commission retained by the *Fon* of Nso' had been viewed as a substitute for tribute from the sub-fondoms. When the sub-chiefs were allowed to collect taxes and receive a commission, the sub-chiefs believed that this conferred on them a new status and a far greater degree of politically sanctioned authority than the administration intended to give. As early as the late 1940s the sub-chiefs, now relieved of tribute payments and receiving a tax commission direct from the Native Treasury, began to question the overlordship of the paramount *Fon* of Nso'.

From 1948 onwards Nso' was affected by new policies which aimed to replace Native Authorities, ultimately, by elected local government councils. As a first step existing Native Authorities were federated into larger units and their membership expanded. Monies for local projects were allocated by a new council which met outside Nso'. The *Fon* of Nso' had less control over the redistribution of taxes and far less than he had had over the redistribution of tribute. Meanwhile the Colonial Government itself pursued projects in Kumbo while village fondoms did not get the roads, dispensaries and school subsidies they wanted. The sub-chiefs came to believe that the *Fon* and people in Kumbo were profiting unduly at their expense and hence began to campaign vigorously for autonomy.

First, the closer relationship of the sub-chiefs with the local revenue administration supported them to an extent not initially intended, and weakened the *Fon* of Nso's authority over them. Equally damaging was the fact that taxes, unlike tribute could not be redistributed through the *Fon* of Nso's largesse.' Local derivation was stressed now in a new context: the redistribution of taxes through implementation of local services and public works. But the *Fon* of Nso' no longer had ultimate control over this generalised redistribution. When proposals from the sub-chiefs to the Nso' Advisory council, now subordinate to a larger district authority, were later turned down—mostly by colonial administrators on budgetary grounds but

symbolically by the *Fon* of Nso'—the sub-chiefs claimed he was pocketing the tax receipts and developing the capital at Kumbo without adequately redistributing goods and services to his people in the sub-fondoms.

Colonial tax policies had undermined the credibility of the paramount *Fon* in his sub-fondoms. But otherwise his close relationship with the colonial administration in the earlier context of indirect rule had supported and still perpetuated his superior position. Upon independence in 1961, the policies of the then federal government did the same. Even now local offices of the national government work closely with the *Fon* of Nso'; he plays a prominent role on Divisional development councils and is a member of the Divisional Lands commission. He must approve—at least symbolically—all allocation of land in the Division, both according to customary land tenure rules and according to the national land ordinances instituted in 1974.

While we can trace the beginnings of conflict between Nso' and Nse' back several decades, the dispute has sharpened owing to pressure on land. The estrangement between the two rulers today is predicated upon a conflict between rights over people and rights over territory, the latter by virtue of ritual responsibility for the land in question. This argument is illustrated by the current dispute over Kuvlu', a village on the Nse' side of the Nse'-Nso' border. It is this dispute which occasioned the ritual scene with which this chapter opened.

Fealty, Land and the Ancestors: Arguments Over Kuvlu'

By the 1960s, and perhaps earlier, people from Kumbo had been moving into Nso'-Nse' villages of nggonndzen, Boninyar, Mbarang, Kuykov or Kuvlu'. Whether or not he became tributary to the *Fon* of Nso' aside, some of these villages were in the *Fon* of Nse's domain, and he and his *ataangven* were responsible for performing the rituals for the land and the people working on the land in Boninyar, Mbarang and part of Kuvlu'. While there were numerous disputes caused by extensive crop damage due to the numerous cattle inhabiting the area, especially around nggonndzen, there were, until the 1970s, few disputes about who controlled access to the land in and around the villages. Fertile Kuvlu' is an internal frontier region of the fondom of Nso'. It lies between Nse' and Nso' proper. It has been occupied and farmed from time immemorial both by the people of Nse' and Nso' proper. But the *Fon* of Nse' was given ritual control of the area occupied and farmed by the people of Nse' origin. As land became scarce around the capital at Kumbo, more people from Nso' proper 'begged' land and moved to live and farm in outlying areas, including Kuvlu'. This increased their

population in Kuvlu' and brought more farm land under their control. As a result the people of Nse' as a whole felt threatened and their *Fon* felt compelled to lay claim over all of Kuvlu' as part of Nse'. But while the *Fon* of Nse' is not pleased that more people from Nso' proper are farming in Kuvlu', the dispute is not about the farming of the land as much as it is about control over the symbols of authority over the people farming on the land.¹³ The *Fon* of Nso' maintains that he is the supreme *Fon* and thus ultimate overlord of all land and people in his kingdom. He claims that this position entitles him to control any area where Nso' people have acquired land. Therefore, he insists, people who have settled in Kuvlu' should observe his 'Country Sundays' and pay taxes directly through him. But since all of Kuvlu' is viewed by the *Fon* of Nse' as part of his territory he insists that people living in Kuvlu'—both Nse' people and people of Nso' proper—should pay taxes directly through him and observe the Country Sundays of Nse'.

Depending on the meaning assigned to various symbols and acts, each argument has an interpretation which gives it customary legitimacy. As Raymond Williams¹⁴ has argued, most versions of 'tradition' can quickly be shown to be radically selective. From the past, which presents multiple meanings and practices with a variety of interpretations in relation to the present, certain meanings and practices are selected to have meaning and efficacy and others are discarded. Such selection is then passed off by the dominant group as 'the tradition' and 'the significant past'. Therefore any tradition is an aspect of contemporary power relationships; it is that aspect which is meant to connect with and ratify these relationships in the interests of a dominant group. Particular events always happen in time, and become part of different versions of history, which can then be used to buttress arguments about relationships in the present. The *Fon* of Nse' points to the fact that the *Fon* of Nso' will not perform the traditional wine-drinking ceremony with him to swear the validity of his claim. He presents this as evidence that the *Fon* of Nso' knows the land really belongs to Nse' and, knowing he is in the wrong, is afraid to perform the ritual.

The *Fon* of Nso' counters this argument by claiming that he does not fear the ritual, but it is simply beneath his dignity to submit to the *Fon* of Nse's request. It is important here to re-emphasise the significance of the meaning of the earth (*nsay*) in Nso' cosmology. Legitimate authority is based on descent and the ancestors, and the earth of the dead is the repository of religious moral values Which are given legitimacy by referring to them as ancestral values.¹⁵ The earth can be called upon to punish offenders. The earth is viewed as the place where the important dead, the ancestors, reside; they sleep underfoot and can be awakened. If an act occurs which is

considered to be a trespass against moral values, the earth of the dead may get 'hot' (angry) and refuse to grow crops and otherwise afflict the area. An act of appeasement is then required so that the earth is 'cooled' and sleeps again.¹⁶ The *Fon* of Nse' and his *ataangIVEN* emphasise that they perform rituals for the land at Kuvlu'. They view the area as part of Nse' and claim the fealty of people living there--and invoke their ritual obligations for part of the land as proof.

Since tax is seen as a form of tribute, the debate has centred on which ruler people pay taxes through, but the real issue is much more complex. It is also, and more crucially here, a conflict between the ideal of control over people as opposed to control over territory as a justification for controlling land. As land becomes both scarce and expensive, people on all levels are trying to hold on to as much land as possible. Both the *Fon* of Nse' and the *Fon* of Nso' believe they are in the right—and in a sense both are. They are merely applying different interpretations and resting their arguments on different principles of right and obligation—the *Fon* of Nso' emphasising the ideal of rights in people, and the *Fon* of Nse' stressing rights in territory. When asked how the dispute would have been settled in the past, elders in Nse' claimed that the disputes would not have arisen in the past; the 'land was not so difficult [to get] then' and the land was 'blank'. We could add that the presence of a higher court of appeal, the national government, has probably strengthened the resolve of the *Fon* of Nse' to hold his ground, so to speak, against the more powerful paramount *Fon*. It is not surprising that the principles of rights in people and rights in territory should have come into conflict at this time, since historically land was abundant and direct control over people the key to power and wealth, while today land is becoming scarce, and people more abundant, and no longer do traditional leaders have direct control over their dependants' lives and fortunes.¹⁷ Given the current practice of some Nso' landlords of demanding an 'under the table' cash payment for the use of land and the cash value the government has recently attached to urban land (Goheen, 1984, 1988)¹⁸ as well as the national government's emphasis on privatisation, these values were bound to come into conflict in Nso', whose core values stress freely available farmland for all its citizens. An unexpected twist to this particular dispute lies in the fact that, from one vantage point, the claim of the *Fon* of Nse' would appear to be more orthodox, whereas from another, that of the *Fon* of Nso' would seem to be so. One might expect a claim to rights in territory to be buttressed by more recent or imported values.¹⁹ What is clear here is that, for the Nso', control over land remains a central symbol of leadership, both historically and today.

The Judgement: Between Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

The inability of these two rulers to come to a compromise finally led to intervention by the District Officer and his staff—men who are seen and who see themselves as part of a new Nso' elite. Their decision, while not entirely satisfactory to the paramount *Fon*, favoured his position.²⁰ Attempting, and failing, to emulate the wisdom of Solomon, the judges opted for the status *quo*, and divided the land between the two rulers. All people farming around Kuvlu' who were not originally from Nse' were to pay taxes to the *Fon* of Nso' and observe his Country Sundays, while Nse' people would continue to pay taxes directly through the *Fon* of Nse' and observe his ritual day of rest.

Given his relationship with the government bureaucracy, it comes as no surprise that the decision favoured the *Fon* of Nso'. Yet while the decision favoured the *Fon* of Nso', it did not discount the claims of the *Fon* of Nse' entirely. To have ignored the claims of the *Fon* of Nse' would not only have increased the hostility, it would have gone against what has commonly and widely been perceived as tradition or 'correct fashion' throughout Nso', wherein the justification for control over access to land has been associated with the ritual obligations of a *taangven* or landlord for the piece of land in question.

If we step back and look at the position of the new bureaucrats, it is clear that it would be in their interests neither to cross the *Fon* of Nso' nor to declare publicly an unorthodox position—one which would go against what are commonly seen as valid traditional relationships. While the *Fon* of Nso' decries the commoditization of land in Nso', he also plays a key role in allocating national lands to individuals for development schemes, and is thus a key player in furthering the process of privatisation of land. Many of these new elites, whom I have called 'modern big men' (Goheen, 1984, 1988), use their access to the state and their knowledge of the new land ordinances to acquire access to the allocation of national lands on an individual basis. Access to the state is necessary but often not sufficient to establish a successful claim to land as private property. The approval of the *Fon* of Nso' and two of his councillors, who sit on the land commission, must also be solicited. The new elites must also be sensitive to traditional politics—indeed, most of them assume prominent roles in traditional politics and often acquire titles and offices in secret societies (Goheen, 1984, 1988, 1991).

By acquiring the symbols and roles of traditional Nso' leaders, these men validate the legitimacy of their claims to land and leadership within the

fondom. In assuming the personae of traditional lineage heads they reproduce a social, not an individualised, identity,²¹ for these are social and not individual roles, with obligations as well as rights attached. Traditional rulers in Nso', once enstooled (put 'on the stool' or enthroned), are no longer called by their given name, but rather by the title of their office. Rights, obligations and property belong to the title, not the title-holder, so that when a man 'takes over the stool' as lineage head he inherits his predecessor's name, his wives and his property. If a lineage head is deposed for not fulfilling the obligations of his office, his cap is removed by a representative of *ngwerong*, the palace regulatory society, who then calls him by his given name as a sign that he has become an ordinary man.

The current tax dispute is mainly a symbolic one over the recognition of political allegiance, since the actual tax revenue accruing to either *Fon* from this area is fairly minimal. It is not surprising that the collection of taxes, seen as a sign of fealty and tribute, should have become a source of dispute and tension, as the nexus of control over people begins to change from direct relations of fealty based primarily on kinship to control through ownership and redistribution of resources, including land. The fact that the *Fon* of Nso's credibility in his sub-fondoms was eroded when he lost the power to redistribute the surplus, now in the form of tax monies used for national purposes, demonstrates the degree to which generosity and redistribution are important political principles and symbols of leadership in Nso' society, both historically and today.

As title-holders and big men in Nso', the new elites must have an 'open hand'--they must redistribute the wealth. And they continue to do so. New forms of access to power and control via the modern state have broadened the base of control from an ascribed kin-based form to a more open one which includes an assortment of kin and clients.²² It is still essential that the modern big men redistribute wealth, for staying in the political limelight depends on the ability to dispense favours and goods, not only at politically expedient times but always.

There is, however, a significant difference in the structure of redistribution by the new elites. Resources which are redistributed are gained primarily through knowledge of and access to the national bureaucracy. New forms of redistribution include access to jobs and higher education. Traders' licences, applications for building and development projects, for access to national lands and national agricultural loans are facilitated through the system. In short, redistribution by the new elites includes more or less openly many practices their counterparts in western countries try to hide so as not to be accused of graft or nepotism. These practices all share an important

attribute. By drawing on personal networks and political connections, rather than on individual wealth, the new elites are able to redistribute without giving up their ability to accumulate. Unlike traditional lineage heads, the new politicians in Nso' can claim clients, support kin and accumulate a significant amount of personal wealth at the same time.

By taking an active role in traditional government, and paying attention to customary law and local opinion when making national decisions, the new elites secure the co-operation of traditional authorities in their leadership and entrepreneurial ventures. They have become the mediators between the local and national arenas, the interpreters as well as the architects of the intersections between customary and national law. Importantly, by assuming these roles and often acquiring traditional titles, these modern big men assume a legitimate and culturally appropriate social identity.

The truth about the tributary nature of the relationship of Nse' to Nso' may never be revealed—if, indeed, there is 'a truth'. Clearly the question cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. But the dynamics of the contradictions between sets of institutions, as each group recalls a different history and differentially interprets a set of symbols, and the struggles over meaning and power in asserting rights to control access to land in this small region give us an idea of the complexities involved in trying to make sense of political and economic processes surrounding the control and meaning of land in Africa today.

Conclusions: Land and Social Identity-Conflict and Contradictions

Many of the current conflicts over land in Nso' can be explained by the contradictions which result from the interaction between state-promoted privatisation of land, emphasising individual accumulation, and the core values of Nso', which stress the right to land as a right of citizenship; which see the earth as a repository of lineage values; and which emphasise the moral commitment and generosity of lineage leaders. While there is a tendency toward individualism and privatisation of property, including land, there is a contradictory tendency stressing social identity. This latter stands in opposition to privatisation of individual identity analogous to the possessive individualism which accompanied the emergence of private property in Europe, with each individual seen not only as the proprietor of his property but also as proprietor of himself (MacPherson, 1962). Practices surrounding land tenure arrangements reflect the contradictory nature of a process which is at one and the same time fragmented and united as both privatisation and

patronage increase in importance. The process is not unilinear. Nor is it easily separated into 'traditional' and 'modern' strategies or camps. Depending on the social identity of the people involved, and the nature of the dispute, the same individuals *will* appeal to both customary tenure rules and the national land ordinances, singly and sometimes in combination, and will invoke whatever ideology or cultural Symbols are appropriate to substantiate the claim. Continuity and change merge together, being embodied not *in* different individuals but in the same people playing different roles in semi-separate contexts.²³

As channels of access to land are redefined by the state, contradictions, paradoxes, and unintended consequences increase, and struggles over meaning and power intensify.⁴ 'Throughout Africa,' Berry writes (1989:46), 'where rights of access to land depend on social identity, people are investing in social identity... social identity and status have become objects as well as instruments of investments.' Investment in social identity and status as a key to economic wealth is not new; it has long been a strategy of advancement for ambitious men in Nso'. By presenting gifts to the palace and acquiring titles, these men could parlay wealth gained in local trade into access to the more lucrative precolonial state-controlled trade in ivory and slaves (Chilver, 1961; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982; Rowlands 1979). In the precolonial as well as in the colonial state, access to land and other resources has depended on social identity as well as on the ability to use wealth wisely. This continues to be true in the postcolonial state. What is new today, however, is the modern state and the accompanying potential for individual accumulation, for in the postcolonial period access to the state has become a precondition for individual economic success.²⁵

This discussion has focused on conflicts and contradictions arising in struggles over the right to control land access and use in a context of increasing commoditization and growing land scarcity. The argument between the two traditional rulers, the *Fon* of Nso' and the *Fon* of Nse', is just one level of the current discourse on land rights taking place in Nso'. Struggles over rights to land in Nso' today are ongoing between various individuals and categories of individuals. These negotiations are intimately linked into social identity and the interpretation of this identity within the context of a historical discourse which includes several sometimes contradictory themes, a discourse which has been historically changing over time. The particular events which are recalled to validate claims to land have happened at particular points in time and have become part of different versions of history. No relationship is ever static. Relationships between social identity and land have always been intimately connected in Nso'. As

practices associated with control over land change, people recall different versions of history and assert various rights associated with social identity to validate their claims to land.

As tax replaced tribute in Nso' the authority of the paramount *Fon* of Nso' was displaced by the authority of the colonial administration, and sub-chiefs began asserting their autonomy. The tax policies of the colonial government undermined the principles underlying the traditional system of dues and tribute, thus sharpening the discord between the centre and the periphery of the fondom. However, the paramount *Fon's* relationship to the colonial administration perpetuated his superior position. A growing land shortage focused the argument on control of land. Here the principle of control over territory was invoked by the sub-chief, the *Fon* of Nse', while as paramount *Fon* the *Fon* of Nso' invoked his rights of control over all people living in the fondom.

The solution to this conflict favoured the *Fon* of Nso' but stayed within the bounds of orthodoxy by taking seriously the *Fon* of Nse's arguments regarding his ritual obligations for the piece of land in question. The decision did not rest on the land ordinances of the state; instead, with a bow to the *Realpolitik* of the fondom, it stayed firmly within the orthodox discourse. However, customary land tenure arrangements, part of the *doxa* before the introduction of coffee in the 1930s and its later spread (Kaberry, 1950, 1960), are no longer orthodox. The universe of discourse within which negotiations about land take place has become increasingly heterodox, changing from one in which access to land (and other resources) is determined primarily by social identity to one in which social identity is often created by control over property, including land. The practices engaged in by the new elites reflect and reproduce this shift. The new elites have privileged access to the state. By adroit use of this political connection and some personal wealth, they can maintain a large network of kin and clients and feed wealth into the local redistribution system. They are active in traditional politics, and often assume the social identity of more traditional Nso' leaders. Adept at playing both national and local politics, they have become the translators of received custom and national law into new practices.

In the customary tenure system, traditional land settlement and rights of various individuals to land are supported by relations based on kinship and by the *Fon's* and the lineage head's appeal to the legitimacy of the ancestors. There is a conflict set up then between traditional land settlement and individualised ownership as private property. This conflict is resolved by the investment of the new elites in traditional social identity. But the contradiction between traditional land settlement and the national laws which

stress national control, development and privatisation is not resolved, and social identity is not going to continue to mediate the conflict as this contradiction deepens with increasing pressure on land.

The dialectical relationship between land settlement and appeals to kinship supports an internal hierarchy where legitimacy is based on the moral legitimacy of the earth and the ancestors. This comes into conflict with the secular legitimacy of the modern state, which supports individual ownership and privatisation. The contradictions set up by this conflict cannot be mediated by the new elite's investment in social identity as the state pursues its project of 'rational development' (Cameroon, 1974). It is the contradictions which drive change. These contradictions will ultimately create a transformation of the tenure system. But the ways in which the system changes are a matter of negotiation and struggles over the meaning of land. The struggles are informed by different interpretations of what is—and should be—happening on the part of various social actors. They are also informed by various relations of power both within the fondom and within the modern state.

'It is in the structure of practice,' Sahlins argues (1981:72), 'that relationships themselves are put at issue, not just this or that cultural category.' The true meaning of practice can remain obscure and distorted, with consequences that often outrun individual conscious intentions.² Whether willy-nilly or by design, practices regarding land in Nso' have radically altered the social relation of land tenure. The differential connections of the educated elites and the typical village farmer with the modern state have changed internal relationships in Nso' in ways which are often more real than apparent. In the current political economy of land, everyone is scrambling, because land is quickly becoming scarce and expensive. This obviously leads to conflicts between various constituencies of the fondom, including, as we have seen, the paramount *Fon* and his sub-chiefs. To validate his claim, the *Fon* of Nso' appeals to old principles of control over people and land, while the *Fon* of Nse' appeals to old principles of control over land by virtue of the ancestors and his ritual obligations. The new elites can appeal to new laws and the paraphernalia of the modern state as long as the *Fon* and some sub-set of his councillors will support them. New elites invest in the cultural symbols of political leadership and are active in traditional politics. They feed cash into the local distribution system and maintain large local kin and client patronage networks. It is ironic that the participation and investment of the new elites in traditional roles and their public adherence to custom have facilitated the ease with which they engage in practices which have led not to the reproduction but rather to the

transformation of the structures and relationships of power in Nso'. When the Nse' lineage heads, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, call upon the Earth to pass judgement on the disputes over land in Nso' today, which principles will endure and just what will that judgement be?

Epilogue

I returned to Nso' in the summer of 1988 and again in 1991. There was now a new *Fon* of Nso' (d. 1993) who had much graver problems than his dispute with the *Fon* of Nse'. Unlike the late *Fon* of Nso', his successor was said not to have an 'open hand', and both wine and conversation dried up at the palace in Kumbo until recently. There was a heated dispute between the two secret societies, *ngwerong* and *nggiri*, over the distribution of power, and each, particularly the latter, has denounced the support of the *Fon* of Nso' for the other. The hostility between the two rulers regarding the dispute over Kuvlu' remained unresolved, with neither *Fon* willing to resolve it in a culturally appropriate way, which—referred to as a *kiman* ceremony—requires that a goat be sacrificed. People in Nso' say the *Fon* of Nse' can (and should) give a goat to the *Fon* of Nso' to end the problem between them and make peace but the *Fon* of Nso' cannot give the goat because he is not under the *Fon* of Nse'. They point to the fact that the *Fon* of Nso' ended up giving the hoes back to the women farming in Kuvlu' and therefore took a step towards resolving the animosity between the two rulers. Nso' notables claim that, if a goat is necessary to resolve the issue according to ancestral tradition, then the *Fon* of Nse' should provide it; for the Nso' the return of the hoes is already the *kiman*, or resolution, of the affair. Notables in the palace in Kumbo claim that, if the *Fon* of Nso' gives the goat, it means that the land is no longer part of Nso'; therefore no goat can be given. Until the issue of the goat is resolved the death celebration of the late *Fon* of Nso' cannot be celebrated by *ngwerong* in Nse'. This has meant further estrangement between Nso' and Nse' and has led the *Fon* of Nse' to emphasise his ties to the national state rather than to the paramount *Fon*. But it is telling that land in Nse' itself—a village of only some 4,000 persons, without good year-round road access, running water, or electricity, and few of the amenities found in larger villages—is currently being purchased for substantial amounts of money by absentee landlords—not on a large scale, but still an indication of the trend towards privatisation and the changing meaning of control over land.

Endnotes

1. The title *Fon* (pl. *afon*) is used for chiefs throughout the highland Grasslands of Western Cameroon. The Grassfields are a high-altitude savannah area which from the early colonial period was seen to possess a distinct political and cultural unity. The region was named by the German colonialists after the tall grass which is the predominant vegetation.

2. The *Fon's* wine is seen to have potent truth-finding power. See Chilver (1990) and Mzeka (1980) for an analysis of Nso' cultural symbols.

4. The quotation is from a pamphlet put out in Nse' for Nse' Traditional Week in 1977, quoted below in the text.

4. See Sahlins (1981:7): 'the great challenge to an historical anthropology is not merely to know how events are ordered by culture but how in that process the culture is reordered. How does the reproduction of a structure become its transformation?'

5. See Friedman (1979), Godelier (1978), Althusser and Balibar (1970) and Williams (1977), all of whom argue in various ways that social relations are often contained and reproduced in the superstructure, that the relationships between production, distribution and exchange are often played out in the superstructure. They also see ideology as an aspect of the social relations of production. Ideology from this viewpoint is not a homogeneous or seamless whole, nor does it exist merely as a concealing and mystifying veil hiding the secret workings of society. To use Bourdieu's (1977) terminology, within any given habitus there exist struggles over meaning and the control of meaning, over orthodoxy and heterodoxy, which, while not separate from material reality, are neither a mere reflection nor an epiphenomenon of the material base.

6. Statistics from Scott and Mahaffey (Goheen 1980).

7. For the oral historical traditions of Nso' see Chilver and Kaberry (1968) and Jeffreys (1962).

8. This process of incorporation was relatively long, beginning, perhaps with some limited expansion around the first capital and accelerating in the second half of the nineteenth century spanning the reigns of three *afon*.

9. According to both the Nse' Week council (1977) and various people in Nse' and in Nso' proper, the Nse' aided the Nso' when they were at war with Bamum, Din and Ndu. After Nso' had defeated Bamum, the *Fon* of Nso' took the head of the *Fon* of Bamum, who was killed in the war, and the *Fon* of Nse' took his cutlass, his necklace decorated with frogs, and his cap, which are still in the keeping of the *Fon* of Nse' today. According to the Nse', that is why during the reconciliation of Nso' and Bamum, many of the traditional activities were performed by the *Fon* Nse'.

10. It is worthy of note that the Nse' Cultural Week pamphlet does not mention this transaction but instead claims that 'The *Fon* Nse' presented the Germans with four bags of salt and one hundred calabashes of honey which he produced by means of witchcraft' (Nse' Week Council, 1977).

11. The Word for love in Lamnso'--[kong]--can be glossed in several ways, one of which means respect for a ruler or superior. Firewood and food are among the items of tribute traditionally owed by village fondoms to the *Fon* of Nso'.

12. Most of the following historical material was obtained from Chilver and Kaberry (1960), Phyllis Kaberry's unpublished fieldnotes from 1945-63 (at the London School of Economics) and E.M. Chilver's notes (1958-63). The remainder was collected during 1979-81, when I lived both in Kumbo and in Nse' for extended periods of time.

13. The distinction between control over resources by virtue of control over people as opposed to direct control over resources themselves is a familiar one in African customary legal systems. The distinction is outlined in detail in Gluckman (1965). In the 1970s the *Fon* of Nse' directed Nse' lineage heads not to lend out land any longer to people from Kumbo. One lineage head who did so anyway was 'destooled' (removed from office) and fined twelve goats, twelve fowls, and twelve calabashes of palm wine.

14. Williams (1977:115-19). The meaning depends importantly also on the configuration of the relationship of symbols of each other within varying interpretations of history, or, as Rabinow (1975) argues, 'Meaning is not

found on the cultural level alone but in the partial and imperfect relation of symbols to the particular historical conditions in which they are situated.'

15. For an excellent analysis of power, legitimacy and moral order in the Grassfields see Rowlands (1987b).

16. *See* Chilver (1990) for an insightful analysis of Nso' religious beliefs.

17. The population of Nso' went from 50,000 in 1953 to 105,000 by the mid-1960s to approximately 200,000 today. Before the mid-1960s people from Nso' proper had moved into the suburbs and sub-fondoms and to farm in the Ndop plain, to the south-west. Lineage heads in the past had considerable control over their dependants, including arranging the marriages of the women of their lineage and the inheritance of all the material wealth of their male dependants, from which they derived their political power. *See* Chilver and Kaberry (1968) for population statistics. *See* Kaberry (1952) and Goheen (1984) for the relation of political power to control over dependants. The fact that rights in people rather than rights in territory or property formed the basis of power and wealth in precolonial Africa is common knowledge; see especially Goody (1976, 1979) and Rey (1975).

18. Although most landlords will deny that *they* charge anything beyond the traditional calabash of palm wine and a fowl for land use, they all know that others do. Those who do admit taking cash for access to farm land justify the practice in several ways. They point to the price the government has set on land in and around villages. They point to the practice of government officials, who demand a 'dash' for allocation of national land (all land that was deemed to be 'unoccupied' when the 1974 land ordinances came into effect). They say that formerly their dependants were farming the land to get enough food to eat but that now they are also farming for the market the lineage heads feel they should get a cut of the profit. And the lineage heads claim that the money they charge is compensation for handling the increasing number of land conflicts that are brought to them for adjudication.

19. It is usually although not necessarily true that population pressure in rural areas increases restrictions on access to land in African descent groups, but the development of relationships to the land in conditions of rural crowding is not always a simple, one-way process. *See* Shipton (1984).

20. I have argued previously that an understanding of the internal dynamics of Nso' history is essential to an understanding of current relationships between Nse' and Nso'. See Fjellman and Goheen (1984).

16. The various ways in which the self is conceptualised have been a subject of much interest and debate in recent literature. Several studies have sought to place more emphasis on the individual in analysis of those societies where previous scholarship had failed to do so. McHugh (1989) especially has argued that much previous scholarship has stressed societal and relational aspects leading to the exclusion of an autonomous self or self-awareness of individuals as effective actors. Others have dealt with cross-cultural variation in concepts of the self (Shweder and LeVine, 1984; Shweder and Bourne, 1984; Geertz, 1984; Errington and Gewertz, 1988). When I talk about reproducing individual rather than social identities I am not talking about concepts of the self or ignoring the fact that all identities are in some sense both individual and social. What I am arguing here is something quite different about social structure in Nso'—and it is commonplace in many African chiefdoms where lineages play important roles in centralised government—namely, that for title-holders it is the office, and not the individual who holds it, which carries political, religious and economic significance. See Rowlands (1987a:7): 'Many West African societies [are concerned with] the jural definition of status. Here, persons are invested with offices which may be endowed with rights to wealth, knowledge and property. Kinship roles are defined as certain kinds of inheritable estates separate from the persons who hold them.'

This yields a hierarchy of positions rather than persons, based on the inheritance of offices (and regalia). It is perhaps of interest to note that the Western idea of the individual or self *is* unique, as will become germane later in this chapter. Here I quote Geertz (1984:126): 'The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other individuals and against its social and natural background is ... a rather peculiar idea in the context of the world's cultures.'

22. This is a common African pattern within the modern state which is most pronounced among men in bureaucratic jobs who have moved to the cities. See Rowlands and Warnier (1988:130): '... urban dwellers earning a salary are compelled to house and feed young relatives from the village who come to town to attend school and to take advantage of city life. Members of

the urban elite are also expected to put their positions in the State apparatus or in the party to good use, to provide their villages with roads, a school, a dispensary, etc ... and their kin with salaried jobs.'

23. Den Ouden (1987) makes a similar point about the distinctions drawn between 'traditional' and 'modern' identity in the Bamileke chiefdoms in the neighbouring West Province.

24. Berry (1989) argues that this is the case for Africa in general, noting that, after independence in most African countries, 'access to the State became a precondition for doing business successfully'; this created a proliferation of channels and strategies for access to the state, along with conflict and contradictory practices regarding land acquisition.

25. Access to the state is viewed by the majority of authors writing on related topics as perhaps the most critical mechanism for acquiring personal wealth and advancement in African countries today. See especially Hart (1982), Jua (1989), Kennedy (1988), Lubeck (1987), Nafziger (1988) and Berry (1989).

26. Bourdieu (1977:79) makes an argument regarding the conscious and unconscious production and reproduction of objective meaning, claiming that 'It is because subjects do not strictly speaking know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know.'

References

Althusser, L., and Balibar, C. 1970. *Reading Capital*, trans. B.

Brewster. London: Verso.

Berry, Sara 1988. 'Concentration without privatization? Some consequences of changing patterns of rural land control in Africa', in R. Downs and S. Reyna (eds.), *Land and Society in Africa*, pp. 53-75. Durham, N.H.: University of New England Press.

----- 1989. 'Social institutions and access to resources' *Africa*, 59 (1), 41-55.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameroon, United Republic of. 1974. *State Lands Ordinances*. Yaounde: United Republic of Cameroon.
- Chilver, Elizabeth M. 1961. 'Nineteenth century trade in the Bamenda Grassfields', *Afrika und Uebersee*, XLV, 233-57.
- 1990. 'Thaumaturgy in contemporary religion: the case of Nso' in mid-century', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XX (3), 226-247.
- Chilver, E.M., and Kaberry, P.M. 1960. 'From tribute to tax in a Tika chiefdom', *Africa*, 30 (1), 1-19.
- 1967. *Traditional Bamenda: the precolonial history and ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*. Buea: Ministry of Primary Education and Social Welfare.
- Comaroff, Jean 1985. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- DeLancey, Mark 1989. *Cameroon*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- Den Ouden, J.H.B. 1987. 'In search of personal mobility: Interpersonal relations in two Bamileke chiefdoms', *Africa*, 57 (1), 3-28.
- Errington, F., and Gewertz, D. 1988. *cultural Alternatives and a Feminist Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fjellman, Stephen M. 1984. 'What Ramanujan didn't say: sociology and the discourse of order', *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 5, 101-19.
- Fjellman, S.M., and Goheen, M. 1984. 'A prince by any other name: politics and identity in the Cameroon highlands', *American Ethnologist*, 11 (3), 473-86.
- Friedman, Jonathan 1974. 'Marxism, structuralism and vulgar materialism', *Man*, 9 (3), 444-9.

- Gertz, C. 1984. 'From the native's point of view', in R.A.
- Shweder and R.A. LeVine (eds), *Culture Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gluckman, Max. 1965. *The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale university Press.
- Godelier, M. 1978. 'Infrastructure, society and history', *Current Anthropology*, 19 (4), 763-71.
- Goheen, M. 1984. 'Ideology and Political Symbols: the commoditization of land, labour and symbolic capital in Nso, Cameroon', Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University.
- 1988. 'Land accumulation and local control: the negotiation of symbols and power in Nso, Cameroon', in R. Downs and S. Reyna (eds), *Land and Society in Africa*, pp. 280-308. Durham, N.H.: University of New England Press.
- 1991. 'Les champs appartiennent aux hommes, les récoltes aux femmes: accumulation dans le region de Nso', in P. Geschiere and P. Konings (eds), *Itneraires d'accumulation au Cameroun*, 241-71. Paris and Leiden: Karthala - ASC.
- Goody, Jack. 1962. *Death, Property and the Ancestors: a study of the mortuary customs of the LoDagaa of west Africa*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.
- 1976. *Production and Reproduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1979. *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hart, Keith. 1982. *The Political Economy of west African Agriculture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jeffreys, M.D.W. 1962. 'The date of the Bamum-Banso war', *Man*, 62 (May), 70-1.

- Jua, N. 1989. 'The Petty Bourgeoisie and the Politics of Social Justice in Cameroon', proceedings of the Conference on the Political Economy of Cameroon. Historical Perspectives. Leiden, June 1988. Research Reports 35, vol II, 737-755. Leiden African Studies Centre.
- Kaberry, P.M. n.d. Unpublished field notes, 1945-63.
- 1950. 'Land tenure among the Nsaw of the British Cameroons', *Africa*, 20 (4), 307-23.
- 1952. *Women of the Grassfields*. London: HMSO.
- 1959a. 'Nsaw political conceptions', *Man*, 59 (August) 138-9.
- 1959b. 'Traditional politics in Nsaw', *Africa*, 29 (4), 366-83.
- 1960. 'Some problems of land tenure in Nsaw, Southern Cameroons', *Journal of African Administration*, 12 (1), 21-8.
- Kennedy, P. 1988. *African Capitalism: the struggle for ascendancy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lubeck, P.M. 1987. *The African Bourgeoisie*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Renner.
- MacPherson, C.B. 1962. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. London: Oxford University Press.
- McHugh, E. 1989. 'Concepts of the person among the Gurung of Nepal', *American Ethnologist*, 16 (1), 75-86.
- Mines, M. 1988. 'Conceptualizing the person', *American Anthropologist*, 90 (3), 568-79.
- Mzeka, Paul N. 1980. *The Core Culture of Nso*. Agawam, Mass.: Jerome Radin.
- Nafziger, E.W. 1988. *Inequality in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Nkwi, P., and Warnier, J.P. 1982. *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*. Yaounde: University of Yaounde Press.
- Nseh Week Council. 1977. 'Nseh Cultural Week', mimeo. Nseh: Nseh Week Council.
- Rabinow, P. 1975. *Symbolic Domination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rey, P.P. 1975. 'The" lineage mode of production', *critique of Anthropology*, 3, 102-13.
- Rowlands, M.J. 1979. 'Local and long-distance trade and incipient state formation on the Bamenda plateau in the late nineteenth century', *Paideuma*, 25, 1-20.
- 1987a. 'Centre and periphery: review of a concept', in M. Rowlands, M. Larsen and K. Kristiansen (eds), *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World*, pp. 1-11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1987b. 'Power and moral order in precolonial West Central Africa', in E.M. Bumfield and T.M. Earle (eds), *Specialization, Exchange and Complex Societies*, pp. 52-63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowlands, M.J., and Warnier, J.P. 1988. 'Sorcery, power and the modern state in Cameroon', *Man*, 23 (1), 118-32.
- Sahlins, M. 1981. *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: structure in the early history of the Sandwich Islands kingdom*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press.
- Scott, W., and M. Mahaffey (Goheen). 1980. *Executive Summary: marketing in the Northwest Province, united Republic of Cameroon*. Yaounde: USAID.
- Shipton, Parker. 1984. 'Strips and patches: a demographic dimension in some African land-holding and political systems', *Man*, (n.s.) 19 (4), 613-34.
- Shweder, R.A., and Bourne, E.J. 1984. 'Does the concept of the person vary cross-culturally?', in R.A. Shweder and R.A. LeVine (eds), *Culture Theory: essays on mind, self and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shweder, R.A., and LeVine, R.A. (eds) , 1984. *Culture Theory: essays on mind, self and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. London; Oxford University Press.

This is a rich and compelling volume of readings in social history on Nso' and its neighbours in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon. It consists of 19 essays by some of the leading historians, archeologists and ethnographers of the region, with seminal contributions by Jean-Pierre Warnier, Paul Nchoji Nkwi, Bongfen Chem-Langhee, Phyllis Kaberry, E.M Chilver, Miriam Goheen, Ian Flower, Dan Lantum and V.G. Fanzo.

The book covers a broad range of themes from precolonial times to date, including trade, alliances, diplomacy, the iron industry, colonial impact, continuities, discontinuities and compromise, general persistence, ideology and conflict. Warnier draws on linguistic and archaeological data to argue that this region has been settled for several millennia, very probably continuously, and that its landscapes are very ancient and have resulted from many human and natural forces other than the simple clearance of the forest cover of the region at an uncertain date as some authors have postulated. Using data on inter-group diplomacy and alliances, Nkwi puts into question some problematic theses on persistent hostilities and enhances knowledge of the precolonial history of the region. Fowler and Chem-Langhee show how local conditions and needs fostered the spirit and practice of cooperative ventures in the precolonial period, which provided the driving force and the ideological and structural underpinnings for the successful and smooth introduction of modern modes of cooperation in the area during the colonial and postcolonial periods.

The rest of the studies have a unifying theme or thesis, namely, that despite the entry and assault of external, influences, particularly those associated with colonialism, Christianity and Islam, the traditional institutions, customs and value systems of the Nso' and their neighbours have resisted major change and their total corrosion is not yet in sight. The volume illustrates the proposition that historical research is a continuous process of rediscovery which provides new questions, and also that the evidence of other disciplines – linguistics, archaeology and palaeobotany for example – may give rise to many new lines of inquiry and help to correct the documentary record and explain oral tradition. Herein lies the most important element of this experimental collection. Its editors hope that it will provoke other similar collections.



Langaa Research & Publishing
Common Initiative Group
P.O. Box 902 Mankon
Bamenda
North West Region
Cameroon

